

# SOCIETY AND WORLD VIEW OF THE BIRHOR

Ashim Kumar Adhikary














## **SOCIETY AND WORLD VIEW OF THE BIRHOR**



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# **SOCIETY AND WORLD VIEW OF THE BIRHOR**

**A Nomadic Hunting and Gathering  
Community of Orissa**

**Ashim Kumar Adhikary**



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## F o r e w o r d

Sarat Chandra Roy, the doyen of Indian Anthropology introduced Indian scholars to the craft of ethnography through his many studies on the customs of the tribes of Chotanagpur and the surrounding areas. In his famous book, *The Birhors: Little-known Jungle Tribe of Chotanagpur* (1925), Roy was primarily interested in bringing into relief the archaic primitive culture of the Uthlu Birhor nomadic hunters.

Dr. Ashim Adhikary made a re-study of the Birhor in a different region, in Bonaigarh sub-division of Sundargarh district in Orissa, during four field sessions between 1971 and 1976. In this case Adhikary was not in search of the primitive archaic. He was interested in probing deeply into social and cultural reality of the life of the Birhor in the course of their adaptation to two sets of environment : the hill forests where they had an autonomous social life, intimately and morally articulated with the natural environment and a subordinated interaction with the dominant peasants of the plains and their market network.

Adhikary felt that the conceptual framework of "world view" would provide him with the most appropriate perspective for deep exploration into social reality. He followed the path of 'thick description', a 'purposive ethnography', to gain a proper understanding of the world view of the Birhor. It became apparent to him in the field situation that it will not be possible for him to undertake a proper study of the world view as a dynamic process of rationalisation and conceptualisation for creating a meaningful world of living, if he relied exclusively on rituals, crystalised symbols and conscious statements of the meaning of the respondents. He focussed his attention on observing the major subsistence activities in total social and ecological context and then carefully noted down the self-stated meanings of different elements of social action and rituals given by his respondents. He presented him-

self to the Birhor as a genuine 'learner' and as an 'assistant'. The Birhor accepted him as a helpful harmless friend, but not as a member of their own community.

The main thrust of this carefully and elegantly written thesis is to bring into relief how the Birhor have developed adaptive strategies of social interaction in the context of meaning in two sets of environment : a morally ordered *gemeinschaft* in *Disum*, their own territory in the forest, and a rationalist-utilitarian *gesellschaft* orientation in *Muluk*, the territory dominated by the caste-peasants and market economy.

The Bihors of Bonaigarh have so far been able to retain their social and cultural autonomy and maintain the social processes required for the construction of social and cultural forms, as long as they have a viable ecological forest base to fall back upon. They have also shown enough adaptive resilience to present themselves meaningfully as repositories of forest lores and magico-religious knowledge. If the Birhor became substantially or totally deprived of this ecological base, they will have no other alternative other than to accept perpetual subordination to the dominant peasants. It would indeed be very difficult for them to carve out a genuine realm of *gemeinschaft* under such a situation. Perhaps the Birhor in Bhupati colony at the foot of the Ajodhya Hills in Purulia district are facing such a situation.

I think Dr. Adhikary has been able to demonstrate the special utility of properly applying the freamework of world view in the study of social and cultural dynamics. I do hope scholars in the social sciences and administrators connected with the development of the smaller hunting and gathering tribes, will carefully go through this important monograph.

Surajit C. Sinha

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Ashim Kumar Adhikary



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### A NOTE ON THE WORDS USED IN THE STUDY, TAKEN FROM THE LOCAL DIALECT OF THE AREA

All local words that appear in the text of this study are in italic types and begin with capital letters. Each word, when it is used for the first time, is explained either directly in the text or within parentheses following the word. The convention of addition 's' to form the plural, as in English, has not been adopted.

Where possible, the spelling of the local words, names of ethnic groups, sub-castes, places follows the sounds actually used by the local residents, while in others it follows the common usage.





# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### Background

The term hunting and gathering is generally used to denote a 'primitive' mode of subsistence and the people adopting such a mode of subsistence are thought to represent a group at the base of human development. Subsequently, in most of the earlier studies we find a tendency towards reconstructing an ideal type of primitive society (Boas 1888, Fürer-Haimendorf 1943 ; Kroeber 1925 ; Seligmann and Seligmann 1911). Later on, the prevalence of hunters and gatherers over a wider range of ecological diversities and persistence of the hunting and gathering mode of subsistence in the changing techno-economic situations led ethnographers to give emphasis on their contemporary socio-economic organisation and their adaptation to the natural environment (Bichieri 1972 ; Lee and DeVore 1972 ; Steward 1955).

In most of the studies mentioned above the hunters and gatherers are primarily treated as simple, 'primitive' isolates drawing their subsistence primarily from natural environment. Subsequently, their dependent relations with other societies are not considered seriously. It may, however, be mentioned here that Putnam (1950) in his study of the Pygmies of Ituri forest clearly points out an economic symbiosis between them and the neighbouring Negroes. The Pygmies give honey and meat to the Negroes in exchange for plantains. He observes that the relationship between the Negroes and the Pygmies is primarily based on 'an ethnic division of labor', and there is 'no strict process of barter involved'. 'If the Pygmies are stingy, the Negroes will hold back their bananas. If the Negroes are stingy, the Pygmies will leave the territory and go to live with other Pygmies serving other Negro hosts' (*ibid.* : 325). Turnbull (1961) also gives similar instance of economic interaction between the Pygmies and the Negroes of Central Congo forests in

Africa. The Birhor of central-east India, especially of Orissa, with whom we are concerned here present almost a similar situation. Though broadly branded as hunters and gatherers they can, no longer, be treated as a 'primitive' isolate. For their subsistence activities they regularly collect forest produce which they barter or sell in the neighbouring society. However, before I introduce my present problem on the Birhor let me describe here some of the studies and observations on them made by the earlier authors.

There are a number of studies on the Birhor of India. The first holistic study on them is made by Roy (1925) whose main endeavour is to show in them an archaic base of the Mundari groups of tribes in India. This is followed by a few articles which are primarily first-hand descriptions of the life and culture of the Bihors (Bhattacharya 1953, Sen 1955, Sen and Sen 1955, Sen 1967). Later on, a few more studies have been made by D. P. Sinha from a different angle. He has followed the conceptual framework of 'cultural ecology' of Julian Steward (1955), and has tried to show the life and culture of the Bihors as a result of adaptation of their subsistence economy with the forest ecology (Sinha 1958, 1959). Vidyarthi includes the Birhor within his economic category of 'Forest Hunting' type (1964 : 18) though he mentions that 'their exclusive forest economy has undergone modification, and with this their food habits, social behavior, and nature of wandering have undergone a change' (*ibid.* : 242)

In contrast to the observations on the Birhor by the above-mentioned authors, Bose (1956) points out that the Bihors maintain a regular and essential economic interaction with the settled Hindu peasantry of rural India. He observes that having specialised in hunting, gathering and jungle-based crafts the Birhor have become a part of the regional agrarian economic structure. He says that since they do not get permanent patronage in any one village they are converted into a 'nomadic caste' and form a complement to the 'non-competitive productive system' of the caste-based Hindu society of India.

This type of caste-like occupational specialization among

the Birhor is also pointed out by Fox (1969) and Sinha (1969). Sinha, however, observes that the adoption of hunting and gathering mode of subsistence by the Birhor is a case of 'secondary primitivization' or 'devolution'. He pointed out that the Birhor, like many other Mundari groups of tribes in Chotanagpur were, in fact, shifting cultivators on hill slopes. Later on, 'penetration of the caste-based economy into these areas and extensive deforestation' (*ibid.* : 164) have forced the people to specialize in 'hunting and gathering'.

Bose's (1941) assumption is that the Birhor, like many other tribes in India, having found a suitable alternative for their techno-economy within the regional 'non-competitive productive system' gradually enter into the fold of the Hindu caste system by slowly emulating the cultural features of the dominant Hindu upper castes. Sinha (1972) observes, among many such tribes, a level of awareness that they are looked down upon by the caste people and subsequently, suffer from a social constraint for the low social position accorded to them by other caste people. Sinha (1973) points out a phenomenon of 'ocillation' among the Birhor who operate between a settled (*Jagghi*) and a nomadic (*Uthulu*) life. Precisely speaking, while Bose mentions a kind of techno-economic force which pulls the Birhor, like many other tribes, within the fold of the Hindu caste system, Sinha speaks of a kind of repulsive force which pushes them away and prevents their smooth integration into the caste-based Hindu society.

### **Introducing the Problem**

All the studies and observations on the Birhor mentioned in the preceding pages exhibit two distinct approaches. In the first approach the Birhor are studied more or less as an isolated primitive hunting and gathering community subsisting primarily on forest produces. In the second approach the Birhor are studied as a part of the caste-based settled Hindu peasantry of rural India. The hunting and gathering economy of the Birhor is regarded as a specialised adaptation within the fold of regional agrarian economy.



In course of my field study in Orissa I, however, found that the Birhor broadly operate between two ecological terrains—one a *natural ecology* comprising the forests and the other a *social ecology* comprising the settled peasantry. For their day to day subsistence activities they collect forest produces and barter or sell them in the neighbouring peasant villages or markets. In the midst of the social milieu of the neighbouring Hindu peasantry the Birhor suffer from social constraints that they are placed low in the local social hierarchy and are looked down upon by the settled Hindu peasantry. The forest ecology from where they gather most of their resources for barter and sale as well as for direct consumption is encroached upon by the neighbouring villagers. The Birhor devise several adaptive strategies and pursue a number of occupations. They exploit forest produces in a selective manner and cleverly interact with the people of the larger society in order to avoid any direct conflict and to maintain their essential economic interaction with them. It may be mentioned here that all the occupations of the Birhor are based on forest resources and the traditional knowledge of these resources, with which they seem to have a close and intimate association (Adhikary 1974). Subsequently, I got the feeling that the society of the Birhor cannot be understood as a simple functional adaptation either to the forest ecology or to the settled peasantry. Forces from both the forest ecology and the surrounding settled peasantry equally influence their life and culture. I, therefore, tentatively formulate the following propositions that the clue to the perpetuation of their present way of life may be found in :

- (1) the way and the manner in which their adaptation to the jungle habitat and hunting and gathering economy has been integrated with their world view and
- (2) the nature of symbiosis and articulation with the settled peasantry.

Though the propositions are formulated separately they are not exclusive to each other. They are made separate for analytical purpose, and to intensively study the interaction of

the Birhor both with forests and the neighbouring settled peasantry. They are complementary, and together will help us in understanding their total life situations.

### **Conceptual Framework used**

As pointed out, the present dissertation is a purposive ethnography. It is less than a complete ethnography yet more than a treatise on a single aspect of the Birhor life. It intends to understand the nature of their society and the mechanism through which it perpetuates.

There are two major approaches for studying the society of the hunters and gatherers. In one approach (popularly known as the formal structural approach) the emphasis is given on the normative or ideal aspects of society while in the other (known as the ecological approach) the emphasis is given on the adaptation of the subsistence technology with the environmental ecology and the on-going social system.

While in the first approach every social system or activity is thought to be contributing to the maintenance of 'social structure' (best exemplified by Radcliffe-Brown 1948), in the second approach the main concern is with the description of the development of whole society generated through the interaction between the subsistence technology and the environmental ecology (exemplified by Steward 1955).

In both the approaches, however, society is conceived of a 'structural-functional' whole and little or no attention is given to the ideas and sentiments of the people towards their society. To Radcliffe-Brown culture is subsumed within 'social structure' and is subject to the structuring principles. Steward used the concept of 'culture core' to denote 'the constellation of features which are most closely related to subsistence activities and economic arrangements' (Steward 1955 : 37).

In our complex situation of the Birhor in Orissa we find that under the limiting techno-economic condition they cannot optimally operate the clan-lineage based segmentary system like other Mundari groups of tribes in India. For their day to day exploitation of forest resources and essential economic inter-



action with the settled peasantry they organize themselves into households and bands, and wander about a wider territorial region (see Chapters 2 & 3). The household is the basic production and consumption unit of the Birhor and there is a tendency towards nuclearization of the productive units (see Chapter 3). A deep probing into the situation reveals that the Birhor have some notions of kin, and kin groups like clans and lineages that play an important part in their day to day organizational activities (Chapter 4). In my study I have, therefore, instead of using any *a priori* assumption of 'social structure' (in Raddiffe-Brownian sense) and describing the social activities of the people within the framework of normative kinship and descent principles, tried to describe the organization of the subsistence activities and the social groups that are developed therefrom (Chapter 3). The organisation of kin and kin groups is then described (Chapter 4). In all the cases the points of view of the people, *i.e.*, how the people look at, and organize their own social adaptation are taken into account. For convenience I have, therefore, used both the 'formal structural' and 'ecological' frameworks and organized my data.

Instead of describing the complex and diverse phenomena of the culture of the Birhor I have brought in the conceptual framework of world view (see *infra*) which is one of the concepts used in holistic characterisation and comparison of cultures. I have brought in the concept primarily to study their culture in abstract form and the underlying meanings of their life and activities. Efforts to characterize whole cultures in abstract form, their focal points and integration have led to a number of concepts and technical terms pattern, theme, postulates, basic assumptions, values, ethos and the like.

Benedict says that 'a culture, like an individual, is a more or consistent pattern of thought and action' (1949 : 33). Each culture, she contends, has its own characteristic 'purposes', 'emotional and intellectual mainsprings', 'configurations', 'goals' which pervade all the behaviour and institutions of the society concerned. Benedict treats a culture like an individual human being and lays primary emphasis on the dominant

emotional drives and the effective aspects of a culture. The concept of 'theme' is brought in by Opler (1945). He defines a theme as 'a postulate or position, declared or implied and usually controlling behaviour or stimulating activity, which is tacitly approved or openly promoted in a society' (Opler 1948 : 120). There may be several themes in a society. Themes are known by their expressions and abstracted from the ways of behaviour prevailing in a society. In Opler's term a theme 'is identified by and directly related to behaviour by its expressions, the activities, prohibition of activities or references which result from the acceptance or affirmation of a theme in a society' (*ibid.* : 120).

Like Benedict's dominant drives, themes are not all-pervasive. Some of them may reinforce each other, but many will serve as limiting factors. To Opler themes, in fact, constitute the dynamic forces in a culture, and the study of them may throw light on the question of equilibrium in social structure. Like Radcliffe-Brown Opler is primarily 'thinking in terms of the maintenance of equilibrium in social structure' (Piddington 1957 : 611). Hoebel says that the selection of customs in a culture is never random and haphazard. It is 'made with reference to a set of deep-lying assumptions or postulates about the nature of the external world and the nature of man himself' (Hoebel 1958 : 158). The assumptions as to the nature of existence are called by him 'existential postulates'. The 'deep-lying assumptions about whether things or acts are good and to be sought after, or bad and to be rejected' are called 'normative postulates' or values. Both the existential and the normative postulates 'provide the frame of reference for a people's *Weltanschauung* or world view' (*ibid.* : 158). Kluckhohn through his long experience among the Navaho Indians tries to comprehend the unstated and generalised 'givens' of their culture and distills out some essential principles of their philosophy (1959). From evidence like sandpainting designs, curing ceremonies, kinship arrangements, political action and fears of witchcraft Kluckhohn infers a set of underlying premises about the universe in terms



of which they make sense. Bateson (1936) introduces the concept of 'ethos' in anthropology in order to grasp the spirit of a culture. He distinguishes between 'eidos' and 'ethos' of a culture. While 'eidos' refers to its appearances, its phenomena, all that about it which can be described explicitly, 'ethos' refers to the emotional needs or drives, to the system of ideas and values that dominate the culture and tend to control the type of behaviour of its members.

All the concepts described above are brought in primarily to grasp the configurations and dominant pattern of different cultures ; and/or, to understand the underlying meanings of them. Emphasis is given mostly on the normative and affective aspects of cultures and sometimes, on the cognitive and existential aspects. The concept of world view is also concerned with the underlying meaning of a culture. It emphasizes the cognitive existential aspects of a people and broadly refers to the ideas and beliefs that are held by an individual of a group or that group itself about the universe in and around which they live. The ideas and beliefs are defined primarily from the point of view of the individuals concerned 'from inside the culture rather than outside. It stresses the self in confrontation with the universe, (Mendelson 1968 : 577). Though the study of world view emphasizes the cognitive aspects, it cannot be separated from the normative and affective aspects of the people. In brief, it deals with the cognitive as well as the normative and affective aspects of a culture and studies both the stated and unstated assumptions about life.

There are some literature on the study and theory of world view. A precise but adequate appraisal of them has been made by Kearney (1975 ) and Mendelson (1968). I would like to note a few works which are found relevant in the context of my study. Tax in his 'World View and Social Relations in Guatemala' (1941) defines world view as, "the mental apprehension of reality" which includes the total of knowledge and beliefs about nature and man' (*ibid.* : 37). Though in his study among the Guatemalans he distinguishes world view from social relations, he suggests that the perception of the

latter enters into the 'mental apprehension of reality', *i.e.*, world view.

In his 'The Primitive World View' (1962, first published in 1952), Redfield defines world view as 'the way a man, in a particular society, sees himself in relation to all else' (*ibid.* : 270). Though he says that self is the axis of world view he is 'primarily interested in world views that characterise whole peoples', and that are marked by an 'unsophisticated cosmology'. He postulates certain universal elements of world view. He thus hypothesizes that (a) every self has two parts—one differing from another ; (b) a human nature is distinguished from a non-human nature ; (c) there are classes and categories of the human, (*e.g.*, social persons who are intimate and similar, others who are far and different) ; (d) within the non-human nature there is an entity called 'nature' and another called 'God', (e) there is an orientation of the self in time and space by means of major natural phenomena ; and lastly, (f) there is a similar orientation to life-crises in human experience (*ibid.* : 271). Redfield differentiates world view from culture, ethos, mode of thought, and national character mainly on the differences in terms of generality and the level of awareness of cognition between the observer and the observed. In his subsequent works (1953, 1955, 1956) Redfield's concept of world view which has been 'an unsophisticated aspect of cosmology, becomes virtually the outside observer's construction of native's total view, while cosmology seems to be merely the insider's total construction' (Mendelson 1968 : 578). He thus suggests to see the world as the people see it and then to point out the similarities/differences with other cultures.

Geertz defines world view as the cognitive existential aspects of a given culture and differentiates it from ethos which he defines as the moral and aesthetic aspects of a culture. He states that world view is a peoples 'picture of the way things, in sheer actuality are, their concept of nature, of self, of society. It contains their most comprehensive ideas of order' (Geertz 1968 : 307). He observes that world view combining with ethos and values underpins religion 'to give to a set of



social values what they perhaps most need to be coercive : an appearance of objectivity' (*ibid.* : 307). He notes that meanings are stored in sacred symbols which synthesize world view and ethos of a culture at some level. 'The implications of his works are, however, important for the study of symbolic systems and ethics' (Mendelson 1968).

Jones (1972) reviews different approaches to world view and says that at the level of common denominator it involves beliefs. Following certain mathematical model he introduces the idea of belief-space that includes both narrow-range and wide-range vectors. While the former are specific for relative determinate situations and 'enable us to cope with some aspect of the social and physical environment', the latter have less obvious uses and are 'less obviously related to the environment,' Jones defines world view primarily in terms of these wide-range vectors which are not easily verbalized or not verbalized at all. Mehra (1977) calls this a behaviouristic approach and states that world view cannot be studied by the observation of behaviour alone.

Douglas in her book 'Natural Symbols' (1973) equates cosmology with world view, and says that each cosmology each world view—'has its hidden implications. These are its unspoken assumptions about the nature of ultimate reality' (*ibid.* : 173). In this book her 'problem is to find some relation between cosmological ideas and characteristics of social relations' (*ibid.* : 84). She tries to establish that there is a relationship between the cosmology and the corresponding social forms.

Alan Dundes points out that world view of a people often remains implicit rather than explicit. He says that by studying 'folk ideas' of a people one may comprehend their world view. He contends that 'all cultures have underlying assumptions and it is the assumptions or folk ideas which are the building blocks of world view' (1971 : 69). By 'folk ideas', he means 'traditional notions that a group of people have about the nature of man, of the world, and of man's life in the world' (*ibid.* : 68). Dundes considers folklore as the most important source for the study of world view.



In his introduction to 'African Worlds' (1954) which is a collection of nine articles by different authors on the African peoples, Forde maintains that world view is expressed primarily in the belief system. It is also derivable from customs, rituals, and actions. He observes that 'each study seeks to portray and interpret the dominant beliefs and attitudes of one people concerning the place of Man in Nature and in Society, not only as revealed in formal and informal expressions of belief but also as implicit in customs and ethical prescriptions in both ritual and secular contexts' (*ibid.* : VII).

Mandelbaum (1961) in his study of Kota world view operates broadly within the conceptual framework of Redfield (1952). For operational purpose he uses the concept in terms of man to man, man to supernature and man to nature relationships. Among the Kota he is concerned with their funeral ceremony, especially with the ritual of 'bowing to the dead' and tries to derive their world view.

Mendelson (1968) conceives world view as a combination of three systems—cognitive, attitude, and action systems. He marks the systems with three different levels, *e.g.*, the cognitive systems with the level of scientific world view, the attitude systems with the level of any world view, and the action systems with the level of behavioural observation. He also raises 'the question of Philosophy as a part of world view and/or, framer and judge of world view' (*ibid* : 579). Mendelson gives religion a prominent place in world view study, and contends that it will enable the investigator to approach the world of phenomena a people live in. He says that one should start the study of world view by revealing the 'true names of things' as defined by the society.

Kearney (1975) takes world view to be synonymous with cognitive anthropology in the basic sense of "cognition" indicated in its etymology : co—+gnoscere, "to get knowledge of". He, however, differentiates it from the practices of cognitive anthropology, viz., ethnosience and ethnosemantics in three important ways. Firstly, unlike ethnosience that views culture only through language world view study leans heavily on a non-

verbal behaviour. Secondly, ethnoscience studies primarily folk taxonomy or classification while world view, besides studying folk taxonomy, includes other concepts. Thirdly, unlike ethnoscience world view study is very much concerned with the 'underlying implicit assumptions about such things as causality, time, or human nature' (*ibid.* : 247). He proposes like Redfield (1962a), a set of universal cognitive categories as necessary dimension of any functional world view. They are : self, other, relationship, classification, space, time and causality (Kearney 1975 : 248).

Though the authors on world view define the concept for their respective analytical purposes they all seem to agree to the point that every people order their experiences and live in a meaningful world. Unlike earlier anthropologists of the British structural functional school who studied the world view as subordinated to the social structure these authors on world view prefer to assume it as an explanatory tool for comprehending the life situations of a people and their mental state. A very explicit exposition in this connection has recently been made by Horton (1962). Though some of the authors seem to derive world view of a people from certain aspects of cultural behaviour like folklore (Dundes 1971), sacred symbols (Geertz 1968), beliefs (Jones 1971) and the like, and sometimes along certain human universals (Redfield 1952, 1953 ; Kearney 1975), world view involves both secular and sacred spheres of life and activities and includes both stated and unstated conceptions of the people towards everything as it comes to them. In brief, world view describes the whole reality as perceived by the people and includes their 'conceptions of the cognitive along with the normative and affective' (Redfield 1971 : 88).

Among the Birhor of Orissa who can, no longer, be treated as 'primitive' hunters and gatherers and who, for their day to day subsistence activities, operate between the jungle and the settled peasantry, my primary purpose is to comprehend the meaningful world they live in. It has been pointed out that under the limiting techno-economic condition the Birhor operate a very flexible social organization. They are, however,

found to maintain a very close and intimate relation with forests and show a distinct socio-cultural identity of their own. Under these changing situations I am, therefore, interested in revealing their ideas and beliefs about jungle and jungle resources, their relations and attitudes towards them. I have also studied the social categories, the occupational alternatives, villages and markets they know of, their relations and attitudes towards them. In all the cases I will emphasize the meanings the people put forward for their behaviour. Ideas and conceptions of their own society and self will also be taken into account. Special emphasis will be given on the relation of the people with the things they confront. According to Redfield the relation between the confronter and the confronted forms an important aspect in world view study. Meanings about everyday rituals and other behaviour will be collected from the people. Along with the conceptions of the cognitive, attention will also be given to those of the normative and the affective. In brief, I will try to explore the whole meaningful world of the people, and comprehend their mental state.

### **Area of Study and Methods and Techniques followed**

Intensive field investigations were made in Bonaigarh subdivision of Sundargarh District in Orissa. Necessary fieldwork was also done in the adjoining district of Sundargarh such as Sambalpur, Keonjhar and Dhenkanal—all in Orissa. Special attention was given to a specific group; but other groups were frequently attended to and the variations were noted. Fieldwork was done for fourteen months in four terms between 1971 and 1976, and all the seasons of a year were covered.

Almost all the conventional tools of anthropology, *e.g.*, interview, observation and genealogy were used for the collection of data.

Both structured and unstructured interviews had been taken on the spot from people of different age and sex in different contexts. For the study of world view, special emphasis was given on interviewing respondents about the 'meanings' of rituals and other behaviour. In order to know



the 'meanings' I sometimes contradicted them and placed instances from other contexts. Depth interview of a few informants was also made specially about their idea of the universe in which they live. For interview emphases were given on objective criteria, and consequently observations—both participant and non-participant had been made.

Observing their day to day behaviour and activities, and interviewing the respondents about them had been my consistent techniques in the context of my study. I often accompanied the people to the jungles in their pursuit of hunting and gathering, and to markets and villages for barter or sale of their goods. I participated in many of their rituals and ceremonies and often sat among them while they made ropes and rope-made products. In such cases I placed myself mostly as a humble learner or an assistant. This often inspired the people to correct my behaviour according to their norms and values. Since for world view study I was interested in understanding the meanings of their life situations I often asked my informants about the jungle resources, various occupations and social categories they knew of, and observed their attitude towards and relations with them.

Genaologies had been collected in order to comprehend the range of their own social and kin-world at the level of effectivity and affectivity. Their ideas on time and space were also noticed while drawing genealogical tables.

In all the contexts of my interview and participant observation I tried to take note of their attitude towards me and the manner they interacted with me. I first contacted the people in a market where they are usually identified as a rope-making people. They are also known as *Mankria*, i.e., the people who trade and eat monkeys. Seeing my unusual dress and my interest in visiting their settlement they first took me as a monkey trader (*Cari Sau*). I, however, tried to convince them that I was not a monkey trader but a researcher. I went to one of their settlements and started taking preliminary census and other related first hand ethnographic information. But the people held a passive and indifferent attitude towards me.

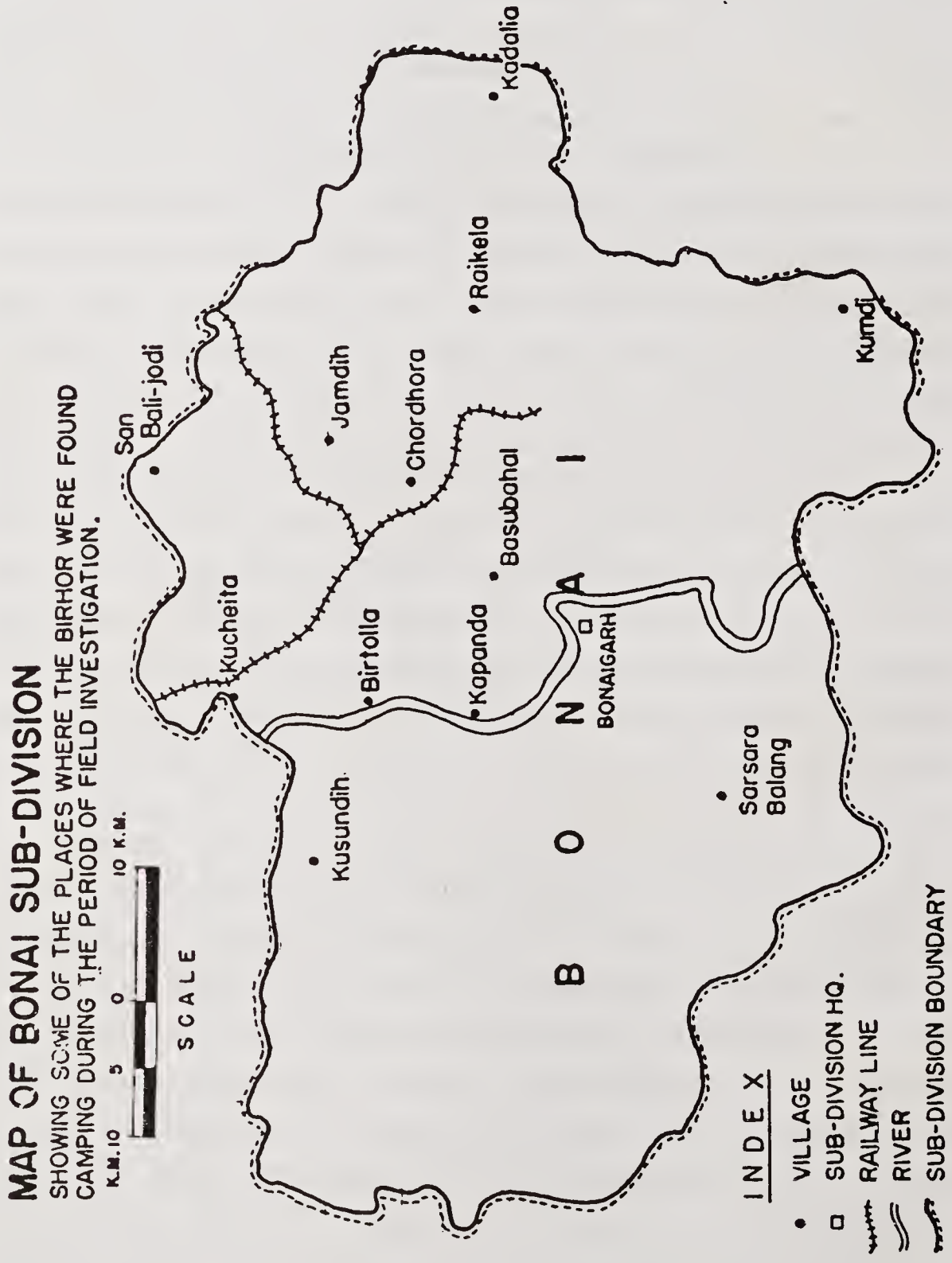
Sometimes a clear avoiding tendency was observed among them. In fact, they were found to be suspicious of my work. At this, I changed my strategy and visited a few other camps in the region. This helped me to know a large number of people who were related to one another but dispersed over a wider region. I carried messages from the people of a camp to their relatives living in another.

At the sight of my movement from one camp to another and my work of carrying their message which was very much important to them they appeared to show some interest in me. An attitude of curiosity towards me was found among them in lieu of their previous suspicion. I, then started spending more time among them in their camp, and often expressed my desire that I wanted to learn about their traditions. My long contact and stay with them along with my interest in their life and activities, in fact, helped me to gain the confidence of some of them. Towards the early part of fieldwork my bondfriendship with one of my informants named Oviraṃ Lakurchuta also helped me in establishing rapport with the people in many contexts. One of my informants Arjun Lakurchuta of about fifty years of age became so close and intimate to me that on the occasion of marriage ceremony of one of his sons he not only gave me money to make the necessary purchases but also the opportunity to take an active part in different important contexts of their ceremony.

I was popularly known in the locality by the villagers as a *Mankria Babu* for my long and close association with Birhor. Sometimes the Birhor themselves also felt that I was almost a member of their community. In fact, my long stay among them and respect for their life and activities led the Birhor to regard me as a man who, like people of the larger society, did not look down upon them and avoid close interaction. Even in market and village situations my seeming alignment with them strengthened this notion of the Birhor. Though I could, to some extent, overcome their initial suspicion I could not be a member of their community. They took me primarily as a man who, unlike other outsiders, wished their betterment and



gave occasional gifts and presentations. They, therefore, interacted with me more freely but regarded me as a rich outsider (*Marang Diku*). Subsequently, they frequently exploited my position by putting me to a situation of obligation either by imparting me some of their traditional knowledge or asking me to purchase their jungle produces.



## CHAPTER TWO

### The Birhor, their Ecology and Economy : The Background

#### The Birhor and their distribution

In contrast to the sedentary village population of rural India the Birhor can be identified as nomadic hunters and gatherers who operate between forests and settled peasantry. It may be mentioned here that S.C. Roy in his book 'The Bihors : A little-known jungle tribe of Chotanagpur' (1925) pointed out of a section of Birhor who were comparatively settled (*Jagghi*). However, he observed among them a frequent reversal to their original nomadic (*Uthulu*) way of life (Sinha 1973) and found minor socio-cultural difference between the two sections.

The Birhor move along forest-clad areas, and are found to be distributed over a wide region of eastern and central India. Since they are nomadic in habit no exact picture of their distribution can be given. However, during 1961 census of India they are found in Bihar (2436), Orissa (273), West Bengal (100), Madhya Pradesh (513) and Maharashtra (22). In Orissa the Birhor are locally known as *Mankidi*, *Mankria* or *Mankar Khia Kol*—all denoting their habit of eating and sharing monkeys. In Oriya dialect *Mankar* means monkeys, and *Khia* means the habit of eating. In 1961 census of Orissa we find a population of 627 against *Mankidi* and 169 against *Mankirdia*. The self ascription of the people is, however, Birhor, and there is no perceptible socio-cultural differences among them in different regions. We will, therefore, be using the term Birhor to refer to all these people.

Though the Birhor are nomadic in habit, their pattern of movement shows a definite ecological niche. In Orissa they are found mainly in the east and north-east areas. They move about in the districts of Sundargarh, Sambalpur, Keonjhar, Dhenkanal and Mayurbhanj. I made my intensive study among

8 migratory bands of the Birhor in the sub-division of Bonai-garh of Sundargarh district. The distribution of the Birhor in this region was, in fact, along the forest extension of Chotanagpur, in the north and east of which the main concentration of the people was found by Roy (1925).

### Ecology of the Area

#### *Forests vis-a-vis Cultivated Area*

The Bonai sub-division is chiefly a hilly tract with an average elevation of 800 ft. above the sea level. The river Brahmani runs through it from north to south and divides it almost into two equal parts. In the eastern side of Bonai, *i.e.*, on the left bank of the Brahmani there is, however, a flat cultivated plain of 145-161 sq. km. with varying elevations. Western side of Bonai, on the other hand is mostly mountainous and wooded except a small patch of cultivated plain stretching from Bonai-garh in south-western direction towards Sarsara-Balang. In brief, of the total area of 3,356,64 sq. km. of Bonai sub-division 9/10th are forest-clad areas (Senapati 1975).

#### *Regional Economy*

The principal economy of Bonai area is agriculture, and 76.35% of the total workers depend on agriculture. Rice, maize, wheat and *Ragi* are staple cereals of Bonai. Pulses are grown in fairly extensive scale. In *Bari* land (garden) adjacent to households the tribal people produce various kinds of vegetables. In addition to these crops the cultivating tribal groups grow various kinds of fruit trees like jack fruit, mango, guava, lemon, papaya, etc.

In these areas paddy is usually grown thrice in a year. Autumn variety is sown in June-July and harvested in October-November. Winter variety is sown in July-August and harvested in December-January while summer variety is sown in January-February and harvested in April-May. Maize being sown in June-July is harvested in September-October while wheat is sown in November-December and harvested in March.

Besides agricultural pursuits the people of this locality



depend, to a great extent, on forest produce. Forests provide quite a number of items that are used by the local people either for direct consumption or for sale and exchange. Of these items *Kendu* fruits and *Mohua* flower that grow profusely in these areas constitute important food items for the tribes as well as for non-tribes from February to June. *Kendu* leaves also have a good market value, and are collected by the people from January to June. *Sal* and *Kusum* seeds are used for extracting oil. *Sal* seeds are also used for soap making purposes. These are available profusely from March to June. Besides these, forests in this area are also rich in various kinds of fauna like hares, porcupines, monkeys, deer, squirrels and the like which the people often hunt.

### *Ethnic Composition*

Of the total population 1,77,064 in the Bonai sub-division 1,15,815 (64.3%) are scheduled castes. There are about 25 scheduled tribal groups and 2420 unclassified scheduled tribal population in Bonai. Of the various tribal communities the Bhuiyan (both *Pauri* and Plain Bhuiyan) are said to be the original inhabitants of the area. Other major tribal groups inhabiting the area are Bhumij, Mundari, Munda, Santal, etc. There are 32 scheduled caste people. Important scheduled castes are Panos, Dhobis, Pantantis, etc. The various other castes are Mahanto, Chasa, Gauda, Hansi, Teli, Brahman, Sundi, Keuta, Jhara, Gudia, Barik. These castes form the rest of the total population of Bonai. The Mahanto, Chasa, Gauda, Teli, etc., are cultivating groups; Keuta, Jhara, etc. are fishing communities; Sundhis and Jaiswals are business communities (Govt. of Orissa '75).

In Bonaigarh the Birhor mostly move about in the area where there is a proper hinterland of forests and settled peasantry. They select, for their temporary camps, the outskirts of forest-clad hills. They always keep some markets and villages in view while selecting a camp site.

### **House Type and Material Belongings of the Birhor**

The Birhor camp in groups of related families or, house-

holds and live in temporary leaf huts. A hut is a conical structure of leaves and twigs with a circular base. Some long wooden poles are planted on the ground in a circular manner. They are planted in such a way that their apexes converge together so as to give it a shape of a cone. More twigs and branches are tied around these erected poles by means of splits of barks. Leafy twigs are arranged on it in such a way that the apexes always remain hanging below. At one side of this conical structure a portion is kept open, which serves as the doorway.

During rainy seasons the huts are generally built bigger in size, and at that time two narrow drains are dug on the ground around the circular base—one at the outside and the other inside so as to prevent the water pouring down from the eaves of the roofs from entering into the hut.

The huts in a settlement are not huddled together. There always remains 5 to 6 ft. or sometimes more space between two huts. The usual height (vertically) varies from 5' to 6' and the circumference of the base varies from 32' to 34'. The height of the doorway varies from 2'8" to 3' while its breadth from 3' to 3' 5". The total area of a Birhor settlement varies according to the number of households as well as the nature of composition of population. If there are more households belonging to different kin groups, they may cover a wider area for their settlement. Households related directly live close to one another while those related distantly make their temporary huts a little away from the others.

Every Birhor household possesses one or two hunting nets, two or three earthen pots, a few baskets made of bamboo splits one axe a few bamboo sticks of different sizes. Besides these, some households were found to have umbrellas, hurricane, lanterns and one or more brass materials.

The dress and ornaments of the Birhor are very few. Small children hardly put on any clothes. Boys and girls of 5-6 years wear loin cloth of 6'-7' in length and 1½' to 2' in breadth. Sometimes they wear shorts. But they wear almost no upper garment. Some young boys, of course, do wear



PLATE-I



A Birhor hut



shirts or banians. The adult men wears small loin cloth of 7' to 8' in length and  $2\frac{1}{2}$ ' to 3' in breadth but no upper garment. The Birhor women are not accustomed to wearing any upper garment. They wear *Saris* of about same size as the loin cloth of the Birhor men. One end of the *Sari* is rolled round the waist while the other end is taken over the breasts. The young unmarried girls sometimes wear earrings, necklaces and conchs. The married ladies and the small girls, however, wear almost no ornament.

### Staple Food

Though they procure different vegetable and animal food items from forests, the principal food item of the Birhor is rice. They also eat wheat flour, and rice products like *Murhi* (perched rice), *Chura* or *Chichiria* (flattened rice) and *Khai* (puffed rice). They are very much addicted to tobacco, which they use as *Khaini* (powdered tobacco mixed with lime). All these items the people have to procure from the neighbouring settled peasantry.

### Economic Activities of the Birhor

The Birhor pursue quite a number of occupations of which making of rope and rope-made products is the primary one. They prepare ropes out of fibres of a jungle creeper *Bauhinia-Valii* and they appear to be specialized in this profession. They prepare four varieties of ropes, namely, collar ropes for tying cattle, draw ropes for pulling water from wells, and *Dhauri* (a long rope having a number of loops suspended from it) for tying a number of cattle at a time for treading them over paddy grains, and *Joti*, a kind of narrow rope for domestic use. Besides these they prepare *Topa*, a kind of small basket made of barks, used for extracting oil from oil seeds and a few varieties of *Shika*, a kind of rope-made net used by the potters for carrying earthen pots or by other people for domestic purposes.

Hunting monkeys and other wild games is the next important occupational pursuit of the Birhor. Though wild



games are primarily hunted for consumption purpose, they occasionally deal in live monkeys and skins of langur. Two varieties of monkeys, namely, *Maccacus rhesus* and *Presbytes entellus* are available in plenty in these areas. Occasionally monkey traders visit Birhor camps, when the Birhor are found to pursue hunting specially monkeys in large scale. It may be mentioned here that the traders purchase the *Maccacus* variety only, and their visits are very infrequent.

While making of ropes and rope-made products based on jungle resources is their primary occupation and can be run almost uniformly throughout the year, hunting of wild games is secondary and does not contribute much to their total economy. The Birhor hunt by nets, and hunting by nets during rainy season is very difficult. Besides, hunting of wild games is uncertain and is met with frequent failures. Hunting is, therefore, pursued occasionally. From October 15 to November 30, 1971 when I was staying with a band of 6 households, I found that the people went for hunting on 7 occasions. On 3 occasions they were completely unsuccessful. On 4 occasions they hunted 5 langurs that were shared among the members of the camp.

Some of the Birhor deal in jungle herbs of medicinal use. They also collect horns, bones, skins and other parts of rare wild dead animals from jungles and sell them in the neighbouring society for magico-religious purposes. Some of them occasionally work as agricultural labourer in the neighbouring peasants' villages, and act as magico-religious experts to the villagers. Some of the solitary Birhor are also found to resort to begging in the neighbouring villages and markets.

### **Movement**

For their day to day subsistence activities the Birhor have to move from one place to another. The Birhor usually move and camp in small bands of some related households though every household has got the economic independence of moving alone from one band to another. In course of their movement the Birhor encamp near some peasant village by the side of a

road. While selecting site for their temporary camps they also keep in view forests, markets and some water sources around. They do not camp near every village. The villages must be previously known to some of them. It may be mentioned here that the Birhor often use these villages as reference points for their temporary camps. For instance, if a camp is located near the village Birtolla they refer to it as Birtolla *Tola*.

The Birhor do not possess much material belongings, and usually move on foot. At the time of movement the adult male of the household carries the major portion of the load which is kept hanging by two *Shika* from a long stick (locally known as *Bahinga*) across his shoulder. Other members—even the small children also carry in their hands whatever they can.

The movement of the Birhor is determined by several factors. They collect resources not only in terms of their availability in jungles but also in terms of their demands in the larger society. When they feel shortage of resources in a jungle or find demands of their products diminishing in the neighbouring villages and markets they move to another area.

The usual stay of the Birhor at a place varies from 15 to 30 days or sometimes more. During rainy season when roads in these area of Orissa are often submerged under water flowing down from the hills and mountains, they usually have to stay at one place for more than a month. During these days it becomes difficult for the people to mount trees for collection of *Bauhinia-Valii* creepers. Their ropes and rope-made products also do not get adequate patronization in villages and markets at that time. This season appears to them dull, and is not very much liked by the Birhor as it prevents their free movement. During this time the Birhor are found to depend heavily on the villages for various matters.

Winter is the best season to them since during the period they cannot only move freely but also feel to have easy access to the resources in forests and adequate demands of their products in the larger society. Almost all the varieties of their ropes and rope-made products are in good demand in

the neighbouring markets and villages. The hunting of wild games by nets which is difficult during rainy season becomes easier at that time. Summer months are also favourable for their profession.

When the Birhor feel that there will be no more collection of *Bauhinia-Valii* creepers in the proximal jungles they either extend their area of exploitation still staying at the place or shift their camps to another area. If there are good markets and big peasant villages around, the Birhor try to extend their area of exploitation in forests or, if they feel, may shift to a nearby convenient place but never far away from the markets and villages. When a market is found to be visited by the Birhor of more than one or two bands living in proximal distance or together at one place, the demands of their ropes and rope-made products may diminish. In such a situation some of them either visit other markets or simply withdraw from the site and move to other places. Sometimes over crowding at a place is solved by splitting a band into 2 or 3 smaller units and dispersing in different directions.

Besides those external environmental factors there are also some internal factors which influence the movement of the Birhor. For their day to day subsistence activities the Birhor have to divide their community into independent production and consumption units and move about in a wider area. This stands not only in their way of perpetuating large corporate kin group but also in finding marriageable spouses. For meeting relatives as well as for seeking spouses the Birhor are often found to leave one band and move to another.

The Birhor usually move in a circular manner, and there is no fixed territory for any band or household. They move along known routes. The area the people of a band would like to move about is decided primarily on mutual understanding of the people and there is no central authority in any band guiding their movement. If a band moves along a particular area it does not come back to it immediately. Instead, it passes through another area. During their occasional meetings in villages and markets information is exchanged



among the individuals, and subsequently, the Birhor come to know which area is wroth-moving and which is not.

The places a Birhor band is usually found to move in a year are not confined to any administrative zone. A cycle of movement of a Birhor band may cover areas of different police stations, or of different subdivisions and districts, or even of different provinces. However, they always move along forest-clad areas intersected by peasant villages and markets more or less in a circular manner.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Social Organization of Subsistence Activities

Though broadly branded as hunters and gatherers the economy of the Birhor in the above mentioned areas of Orissa can, no longer, be described as a simple 'primitive' one. The people, unlike other 'primitive' hunting and gathering isolates, are exposed to the complex market system, and the gamut of Birhor economy involves exploitation of forests on one hand and the larger society on the other.

#### Social Groups

The Birhor have to collect forest produces and convert them into necessary consumable items through markets and peasant villages. However, like hunting and gathering communities in general, the Birhor organize their socio-economic activities in groups. Household and band are two such important groups.

#### *Household*

Household is the basic unit for production and consumption among the Birhor, and is centred round a common hearth. It is locally known as *Orha* (literally, *Orha* means house or hut). Household is, indeed, the customary unit of the Birhor to refer to their number of population at a site. The number of population at a site is always expressed in terms of *Orha* or households although there may be more huts than the number of households. Contextually, therefore, an *Orha* means a group of individuals who produce, consume and live together, and maintain a common hearth.

In the course of our fieldwork we encountered 59 households. The composition of these households shows occurrences of certain types of families. Out of 59 households 29 consist of nuclear families of husband, wife and unmarried children, 12 nascent families of husband and wife and the rest 18 are partial families. These partial family households consist either of a widow or a widower with her or his children ; alternatively



PLATE-II



A Birhore man cutting *Bauhinia* creepers in the jungle





there can be households not organized around a parent-child axis such as a sibling group (with no parents). Sometimes a widow or a widower having no children may also run a solitary household (Table 1).

Table 1. Household composition

Sl. No.	Household composition	No. of household	%
1.	Husband, wife and unmarried children	29	49.15
2.	Widow mother and unmarried children	6	10.17
3.	Widow mother, widow daughter and unmarried son	2	3.39
4.	Widower father and unmarried daughter	4	6.78
5.	Husband and wife	12	20.34
6.	Unmarried brother and unmarried sister	2	3.39
7.	Husband, wife and grandson	1	1.69
8.	Unmarried brothers	1	1.69
9.	Widower	1	1.69
10.	Widow mother, widower son and unmarried grand children	1	1.69
Total		59	

Household composition shown above covers all the households of the eight bands studied.

The most conspicuous economic activity of a household is to collect barks of *Bauhinia-Valii* creepers from jungles and to process them into ropes and rope-made products so as to make them saleable/exchangeable into markets/villages. Almost all the members of household contribute labour to this system of production. In a usual set up it is the husband who goes to jungles for collection while wife keeps the house. Besides cooking and rearing up children, she has to visit village markets (*Gooli Basar*), with ropes and rope-made products. From 8 to 10 years of age boys are found to have been accorded economic importance and they go to jungles along with their father or elder brother. Girls from 6 to 7 years of age too either accompany their mother to markets or keep small brothers and sisters at the house thus helping the

mother go to villages/markets. Children who are not yet weaned are usually carried by their mothers.

Authority lies in the hand of the father, husband or the older male member according to the composition of the household. It is not expressed in any formal manner ; it can be observed in day to day dependence of its members on him.

At about 7.00 a.m. to 7.30 a.m. in the morning the men leave the camp for jungles. Immediately after their departure the ladies hurriedly collect some firewood from the neighbouring bushes and bring water from the nearby stream or river. They keep firewood and water in pitchers arranged outside by the side of their huts. After these preliminary works they leave for villages.

In forests members of every household collect barks independently. They, however, work side by side with occasional exchange of words and humour. There is hardly any sense of competition among them in collection of barks. They do not get incited or tempted by the amount of collection of another. If there is easy availability of a large quantity of barks near at hand, they collect very selectively. The bigger and mature ones are then collected while the smaller and green ones are left to grow up. Instead of hurrying to collect as much as they can they collect only for their immediate necessity. In fact, the amount of one's collection of bark is determined not only by the quantity of resources available in the jungle but also by his time at disposal, the nature of immediate needs, and above all, by his physical ability or capability to carry over those things to his camp site. It is often found that even when a man has plenty of resources in his vicinity, he stops collection after sometime, and sits at a place and starts processing the barks. Sometimes he also searches for other forest produce like honey, tubers and fruits.

The women hawk ropes and rope-made products from village to village. Usually, the women move in groups. Women of two to three households move together. In a day a woman can, in this way, cover about 5 - 6 villages (covering a distance of about 20 to 24 km. in both ways). In villages



PLATE-III



A Birhor boy returning from the jungle with his days collection of barks





they sell/barter their products in lieu of cash or goods preferably rice or paddy.

The men again leave the forests for their camp at about dusk, with load of collected barks and other forest produces hanging at the back from a staff (*Bahinga*) on their shoulders. Almost at the same time the women too start returning from villages, along with their daily earnings in the form of rice/paddy and sometimes vegetables and cash. Everyday, indeed, just before dusk one would often find some dark shadows from jungle sides, with loads hanging from shoulders and some from village sides with loads on heads silently approaching a Birhor camp.

The men and women go to their respective households straight and unload themselves. The women wasting almost no time, set the hearth and start preparing rice. The man, on the other hand, sit with their collected barks. For dehydrating raw barks they display them beside their ovens which are always made outside their huts. They either hang the barks from lower branches of trees over ovens or spreads them on slopes of their hut in the direct sun. They also cut the comparatively dehydrated barks into small pieces and sometimes prepare some coarse ropes too. The women, putting their cooking earthen pot containing water and rice on hearth often join their husbands. All the time while working together they exchange information. After the food is cooked they eat and go to sleep. Again with the barking of dogs they get up and hurriedly finish any residual work of making ropes and rope-made products which were not completed night before.

In the morning the men are found to be more busy in making ropes and rope-made products while the women husk the paddy with a wooden mortar and pestle and look after the children. After these morning rituals the men take watered rice (*Pakhal*) and start for the woods while the women start for the villages (*Gaoli Bazar*) with their finished products.

The above is the normal picture of a household with husband, wife and sometimes with small unmarried children. On market days the people, however, change the routine. In



these areas of Orissa markets are held weekly or bi-weekly. On such market days both the men and the women of a household invariably postpone their routine work and together go to the market, with their finished ropes and rope-made products, collected medicinal herbs, and small games/skins of langur. Members of each household carry and sell their commodities independently. Besides the peasant villages that the Birhor women visit everyday, markets are important venues where from they procure their principal food items and other essential things like cloth, axe, knife, utensil, tobacco, salt, oil, chilli, etc. Here they not only exchange goods but also exchange information with members of other camps as to the whereabouts of forest resources as well as the places of demands of their products, and also about their relatives.

### **Band**

We have seen in the preceding pages that the Birhor organize their primary economic activities like bark collection and rope-making mainly on the basis of small household units. The gleaning of vegetables, tubers, fruits, medicinal herbs and even the hunting of small games are organized in terms of these primary units. Unlike collection of barks and other forest produces pursuit of hunting big games specially monkeys requires more man-power than a household unit usually comprises. As mentioned earlier the Birhor hunt wild games not only for direct consumption but also for converting the hunted games into cash or other necessary consumable things from the neighboring markets and villages. Hence get together or agglomeration of a few independent households becomes almost inevitable or indispensable for the exploitation of wild games. Such an agglomeration of a few households living, moving, and co-operating together is termed a *Tamda* or a *Tola*.

In the course of our field work we observed that those 59 households were organized into 8 migratory bands (*Tola*) living and co-operating together, the average size of band being 7 households. The bands composed not of a single decent group but of a number of related descent groups. The



PLATE-IV



Birhor women bound for village markets





different households in a band were related either consanguineally or affinally (Fig. 1).

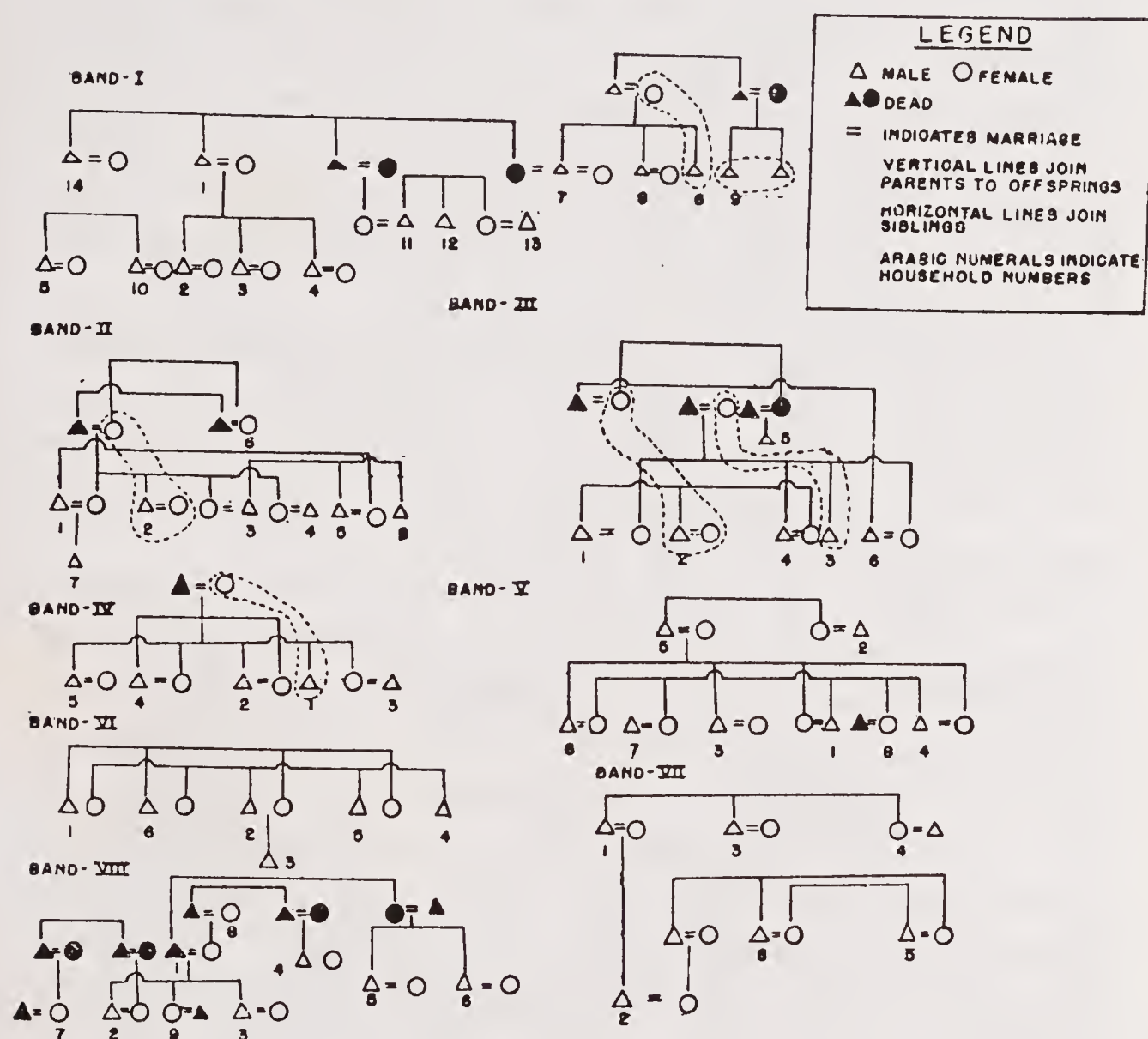


Fig. 1. The pattern of relationship of the households of the bands studied. The relationship shown through the male heads of the households. Full geneologies not given dead persons included only having primary importance to understand the line of relationship.

Although a band may be known or referred to after the name of some man or locality, it hardly contains any centralised authority. It is observed that the man after which the group is often referred to, does not seem to exercise any authoritative power over its members. It is, indeed, the people of the group through whose constant recognition and dependence that authority comes into focus.

Hunting is pursued by the male members. They hunt by nets. There are two varieties of nets—one small variety known as *Tur Jhari* and another big variety known as *Gari Jhari*. *Tur Jhari* means nets (*Jhari*) used for trapping mice (*Tur*), while *Gari Jhari* means nets used for trapping *Gari* or monkeys. It may be mentioned that *Tur Jhari* is used for trapping almost all the smaller games including mice. Besides this method of hunting by nets the people, if happen to come across any game all on a sudden on their way, may hunt it by chasing and beating it with stick or axe.

The Birhor themselves prepare their nets by means of barks. The raw barks are first kept immersed in water for a few days. When the barks become black in colour they take them out from water and make strips out of them. Then they make narrow ropes and weave nets by these ropes.

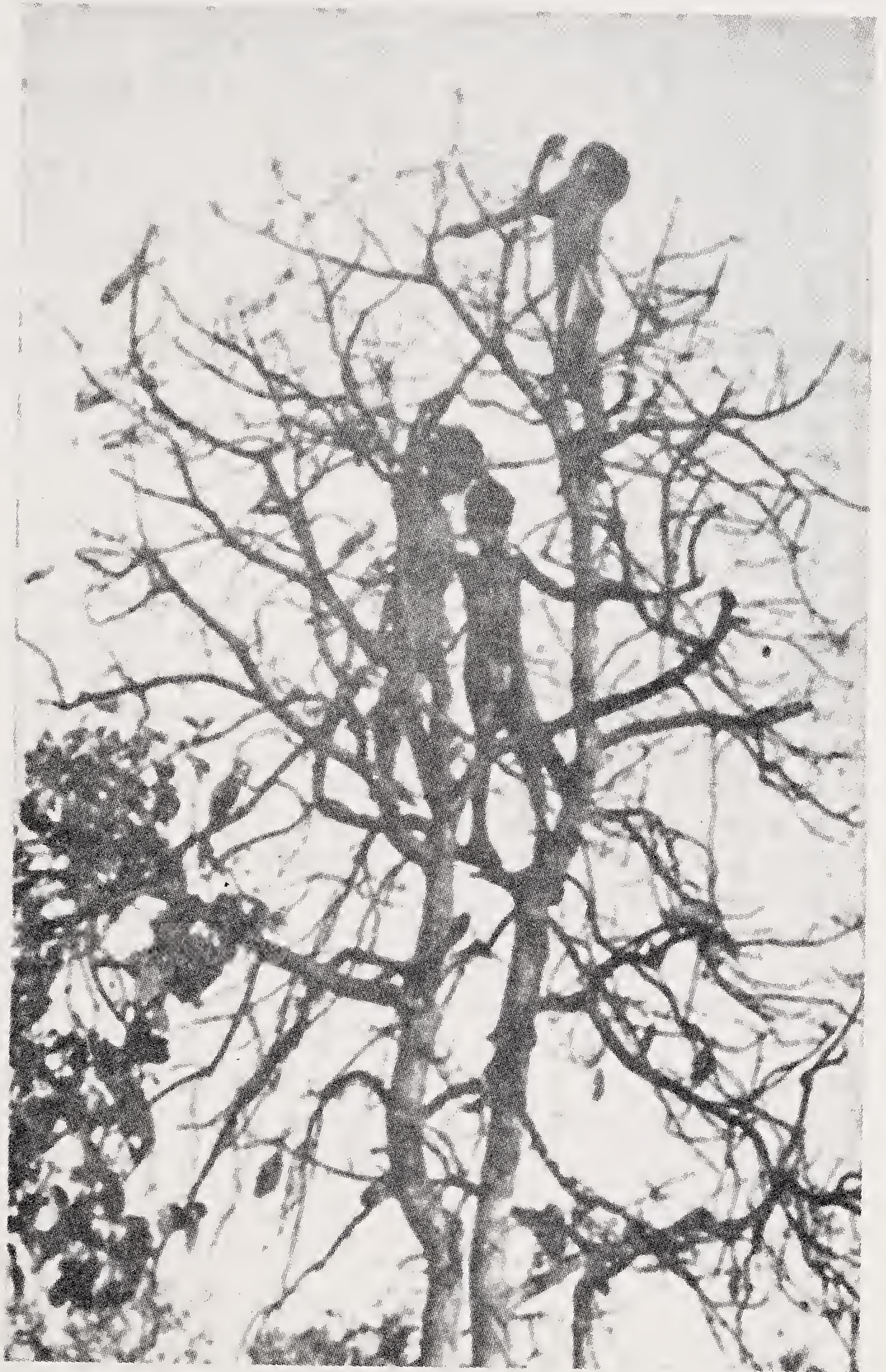
Hunting of small game does not need more man-power. One or two persons may do the job. Sometimes children of individual households may climb trees and catch squirrels or mice by hand. But hunting of monkeys usually requires a band of 7 to 10 persons. They prefer hunting of monkeys to bark collection when they feel, they are in a position to have certain control over the factors of chances in hunting. They, therefore, go for hunting when they have some arrangement for food at hand or when they feel that there is plenty of games in jungles or when some monkey-traders (*Gari Sau*) come to them and advance cash for games.

Monkey hunting is always pursued in groups. They maintain that monkey hunting requires group endeavour because monkeys are very cunning and move in groups. They say that monkeys (*Maccaous rhesus*) move in bands of about hundred and sometimes more while langurs move (*Presbytes entallus*) in a band of 5 to 10 or 12.

In a collective hunting expedition all the households present in one place may participate. There is no obvious leader to guide such an expedition. Any man having a fair knowledge of the place and the expertise of hunting may be followed by others. However, the priest (*Pahan*) has some command over



PLATE-V



Birhor boys searching for squirrels on a tree





the members of his group but his presence in hunting may not be always very much necessary.

The Birhor find traces of monkeys usually in course of their day to day visits to jungles. Presence of such games in a jungle, apart from having a direct sight of, is ascertained from the excreta under trees or by hearing the occasional chatter of the animals. However, the men who happen to ascertain their presence in any jungle informally pass the information to others of the camp. Very informally some date is fixed in consultation with the band priest. In the morning at about 7.30 a.m. to 8.00 a.m. the people come out of their settlement one by one—each carrying a net (*Jhari*) hanging from a carrying stick (*Bahinga*) across the shoulder. Every hunter takes with him also an axe, a small stick (*Taini*) and sometimes a tobacco box. Outside the camp the people assemble at one place and wait for others. After sometime when they think there is nobody else to come, they leave for the jungle.

On their arrival at the jungle they unload their nets and *Bahinga* and keep them in sight of some old men and small boys. They then disperse with their axes in hand in different directions in order to specifically ascertain the whereabouts of games in jungles. People imitate the gibbering of monkeys and look to and fro. After ten to fifteen minutes they start making whistling sounds through mouth, that indicates the returning signal for the people to their nets. On return, they exchange information and come to a decision as to where to set up nets. Usually the slope of a hill with a stream or brook or any water source by the side of paddy field is selected as the proper site. Since the nets are rectangular in shape all of them are first placed in a linear fashion and are tied with one another. Then the angles of the two rearmost nets are tied to trees in such a way that one angle remains above the other. Then the marginal ends are stretched wide in a vertical way by means of *Taini*. The joints of two nets are covered with twigs having green leaves. The people then arrange themselves more or less in the following manner: one or two persons remain at the rear ends of the nets and a few hide

themselves a few yards away in front of the nets. Some go below the slope or to the brook side and some inside the jungle. All surround the nets almost in a wider semi-circular way but always remain in hiding. After that they all simultaneously start making a hue and cry and beating about the trees, all the time approaching the nets and narrowing the circle. Monkeys get disorganized and start moving to and fro in fear. Usually monkeys from the stream side rush out to climb upon trees on hill tops while those from the inner jungle discount and run towards the stream to find way out from the jungle. In both the cases they are supposed to fall into the traps. The hunters in hiding try their best to direct them to the nets. As soon as the stretched nets are touched by a monkey or a langur supporting sticks (*Taini*) slip down and the nets get loose and consequently, the game is entrapped. In the meantime the nearby hunters rush upon and hit at the game with blunt sides of their axes. In case the games are monkeys (*Maccaous rhesus*) that are smaller in size than langur (*Presbytes entellus*) they simply bag them alive but in case the games are langurs they beat them to death on the spot.

The owner of the net becomes the owner of the game, and thus there arises no dispute regarding the ownership of the game. It depends mostly on a chance factor as to in whose net a game would get entrapped, and they know it well that without such cooperative venture monkey hunting is almost impossible. One would, however, hardly fail to notice the differential disposition of a successful hunter from an unsuccessful one. The usual gay and smart disposition of a successful hunter can easily be distinguished from the comparatively grave and morose disposition of an unsuccessful one. If the latter is a promising young man and narrowly misses the game then he is often found to be sullen and subsequently, to be fuming and criticising his failures. Though it is their belief that the hunting of monkeys is regulated by supernatural power, *i.e.*, their presiding dieties, they can feel implication of driving and directing the games to the nets. A successful hunter may, therefore, be marked at one having more expertise



and capability in hunting in the eyes of the general public of the camp.

The hunters usually leave the forests before dusk. They return in groups. But in case a hunter happens to catch more than one game or one very large game he may return alone while others may stay behind to collect some barks or gather other forest produces. It may be mentioned here that since games in jungles disperse in wider areas and hide in distant corners after a game is caught, they give up the expedition for the time being.

In jungles hunting is pursued in a very cooperative manner. But as soon as the hunting activity is over and the ownership of game is decided, an atmosphere of cold indifference and individualism is found to creep in. It is often found that the hunter carrying his game on shoulder along the way towards his camp may feel tired of his heavy weight but would hardly seek another's help. Instead, he simply takes out entrails by opening the abdomen of the game in order to reduce its weight. Although all the participants in a hunting expedition are entitled to have a share of the hunted game, the immediate tendency towards individualism may also be explained by the fact that it is the owner himself who gets the major share, and also the skin that may be converted into cash or goods. An unworn skin of langur (*Hanu Harta*) may be exchanged for Rs. 2 to Rs. 2.50 or 2 to  $2\frac{1}{2}$  kgs. of rice. From our observation we get the impression that the average share of flesh hardly exceeds 2 to  $2\frac{1}{2}$  kgs.

Immediately after his arrival at the camp the hunter (owner) himself starts cutting and dividing the game. He cuts open the game ventrally and carefully takes out the skin if the game is a langur. If the game is a monkey, he simply burns it along with its skin and then divides. The left hand (*Lengate Fari*) is divided among the drivers (*Bebera*) while the right hand and right leg are divided among the rest of the people. The hunter himself takes the skin and then divides the rest of flesh along with his agnates and cognates. The hunter may get a large share but he does not have the power to decide whom to give

and whom not. The pattern is there in the society as a custom or a norm, he simply follows it as a distributor.

We have mentioned earlier that the Birhor also go for hunting monkey-traders (*Gari Sau*) come to their camp and advance cash to them. These traders not only advance cash but also sometimes stay with them in their camp. In such case the Birhor hunt specially monkeys (*Maccaous rhesus*) that are purchased by the traders. The organization of hunting is almost same as the above. But at that time the hunters may stay over there in jungles for more than one day. They usually take rice with them when they decide to stay in jungles. On such occasions hunted games are not shared among the hunters. Instead, each individual hunter disposes of live monkey to the trader in cash which is utilised for the maintenance of his household only. The traders, however, do not purchase all the monkeys. They purchase only those weighing between 3 lb. to 8 lb. Since in a hunting expedition such selectivity is not possible and since games once caught are not let loose, some games may remain unsold. The individual hunter either sells these in markets where some curious villagers may purchase them or the games consumed by the hunter with his household members. What is important to note here is that while in both the cases hunting is pursued on communal basis, there is difference in terms of distribution and consumption of the hunted games. While in the former instance of hunting there prevails a sense of mutual sharing and cooperation in the latter a strong sense of individualism comes to the fore.

### **Selective Utilization of Forest Resources and Aspects of the Birhor Social Organization**

It is apparent from the preceeding pages that the Birhor operate on two different levels of group organization, namely, family-based households and bands of related households for their day to day productive activities. Households are organised, as if, to collect barks of jungle creepers and other produces while bands are devised for the hunting of wild games especially monkeys. From their distribution and consumption it is,

however, evident that household is their basic production and consumption unit while band is flexible and composite in nature. In this respect, the Birhor appear to exhibit a family level organization like the Shoshone in Great Basin and Plateau regions of North America. The agglomeration of a few households may, therefore, be explained as a 'task group' or a temporary device for the occasional hunting of certain wild games (*cf.* Steward, J. 1955 : 109). However, if we look at the Birhor situation from a close angle it would reveal that nature of their band organization cannot be grasped from the interaction between their technology and environment. To the Birhor hunting has almost lost its economic importance, and the perpetuation of small family level units has become more profitable from the aspect of their techno-economic adaptation with the environment. Nevertheless the Birhor are always found to live and move in groups larger than ordinary households, and to pursue hunting. This aspect of their group organization may be clear if we probe into their choice, decisions and selections of forest resources, and the manner in which they handle them.

It may be mentioned that the Birhor procure from forests certain quantity of animal as well as vegetable food. From their statement we understand that the Birhor take about twenty varieties of animal food and seventeen varieties of fruits and vegetables. Apart from their subjection to seasonal variation these forest resources are also exploited by different other ethnic groups of the larger society. The Birhor, therefore, have to exploit forest resources in a very selective and decisive manner so as to assure minimum conflict with the neighbouring communities and chances of greater mobility. Of all the available resources the Birhor devote much of their time in collecting barks of *Bauhinia* creepers and hunting gamee like monkeys that are seldom exploited by the people of other communities. When the *Bauhinia-valii* creepers and the monkeys dwindle in a forest after a few days of exploitation and the demand of their products in the markets and villages diminishes they either extend their area of operation or shift camps for another area.



While every hunting expedition cannot be successful and there may be frequent failures, the expedition for the collection barks hardly faces any failure. The Birhor, however, do not think that the supply of raw materials for rope making can be controlled. They have learnt, out of their long association with forests, that supply of barks can be handled in a more predictable manner than the wild games. Hunting of monkeys is rather uncertain and subject to seasonal variations while collection of barks is perceptibly certain and can be run almost uniformly throughout the year.

Hunting of monkeys can be pursued well during summer and winter season. During the rainy season that covers practically four to five months of a year in these areas of Orissa hunting becomes very difficult.

Besides these natural and technological limitations of hunting the Birhor also lack proper patronisation of their hunted games from the trader whose visits are very casual and uncertain. Subsequently, the Birhor found to take up the collection of barks as the most immediate mode of exploitation of forest resources.

If we look at the organization of the rope-making activities we would find not only a gradual tendency towards nuclearisation of household units but also a harmonic allocation of labour between men and women. The men appear to be in the task of collecting barks and making ropes while the women in that of selling and exchanging them in markets or villages. In fact, women hawk ropes from village to village, and play an important role in the management of the rope-making industry of the Birhor. It appears that the rope-making profession of the Birhor could hardly have been perpetuated without the active participation of their women folk (Adhikary 1978).

It is our general notion that in a 'primitive' hunting society all are not good hunters. The few hunters may, therefore, cause an imbalance in production and consumption, and subsequently, may bring in social inequality. In order to check this, communal sharing of hunted games is socially sanctioned by approving of or allowing some social prestige and influence for the few hunters (Service 1966).

But in the case of the Birhor, hunting is only one aspect of their total economy and does not contribute much to the total subsistence of the people. However, they are very fond of meat of monkeys and find great pleasures in hunting them.

Among the Birhor almost every male member (ranging from a boy of 10 years to the oldest one) possesses the expertise of hunting and gets inspired in the name of hunting monkeys. It may be stated that the very nature of the game and the simple technology of the Birhor make communal participation somewhat imperative. But if we probe into the mind of the people, it appears that monkeys are thought by the Birhor more as a sacred thing than as a scarce resource. Though they sometimes contend that due to the presence of some mines and quarries in these parts of Orissa monkey hunting has become difficult, they never believe in its scarcity in jungles as a normal state. Instead, they say that they have entered in deep jungles. They explain their failures in hunting in terms of their incapability and misconduct. Monkeys, they believe, cannot be caught 'if they themselves do not "wish" or "please"'. Here the presiding deities and games are fused together and are talked of with much reverence. A hunter must observe strict sexual chastity with his menstruating wife before he joins a hunting party. He should also refrain from accompanying any hunting party during the pollution period of his wife after child birth. Along with this a constant and rigorous searching of monkey in forests is a must to them for success in hunting.

A monkey remains sacred so long as it is not caught, killed or divided among themselves. As soon as a living prey becomes a personal property either as meat for direct consumption or as a piece of commodity for sale or exchange it loses its sacredness, and becomes a secular object. In brief, it may be mentioned here that hunting of wild game which was, at one time, the main subsistence activity (Roy 1925) has, in course of time, lost its economic importance. However, the sacred attitude towards wild game still perpetuates among the Birhor thereby enabling them to arrest the progressive disintegration of their society that becomes apparent in the case of their day

to day organization of rope-making activities, and to maintain a higher level of group organization.

### **Symbiosis with the Larger Society**

So far we have described how the Birhor organize the forest ecology specially the exploitation of forest resources and how their mode of exploitation, in turn, influences their social organization. Though the Birhor collect jungle resources in a very selective and decisive manner, they have little control over them. They show a humble dependence on forests and believe that resources are there in forests and one is to go and collect them. However, this selective exploitation of forest resources as well as their utilization as capital or as items for direct subsistence, makes it almost inevitable to run differential level household and band organizations. But in spite of their tendency towards such fragmentation of units in terms of production and consumption the Birhor form a homogeneous moral community living in intimate association with forests which are their main resource base.

### *Media of Contacts*

It is pointed out that the Birhor have already been exposed to the complex market system, and for the perpetuation of their subsistence activities their interaction and articulation with the larger society, specially the peasant village and market centres, are very essential.

Due to the encroachment of the settled peasantry and the setting up of various mines and factories in the area of my work the resources of forests have been dwindled and disturbed to a great extent. The people are well aware of this, and often state that games like monkeys (*Maccaous rhesus*) and langurs (*Prestytas entellus*) have run away in deeper jungles due to frequent sounds generated in the quarries. Besides these, the available vegetables as well as animal food in the jungle which they are accustomed to take, are also shared by the people of other communities living in the region. The Birhor, however, do not believe in the scarcity of resources in the jungle as a



normal state. But for inevitable reasons their entire dependence on forests has been hindered.

Since the food items readily available in forests fulfil only partial necessity of the Birhor they turn to the next alternative food item rice which they have to procure from the nearest markets and peasant villages. For their scanty clothes, oil, salt, earthen pots, and iron axes and knives they also have to depend on these centres. All these things are procured by the Birhor in exchange of their ropes and rope-made products, and the hunted games. They also procure these things by exchanging various other forest produces especially medicinal herbs and tubers. It may be mentioned here that from the point of view of the settled peasantry the interaction with the Birhor is not as essential as it is for the Birhor themselves who have to interact with settled peasantry primarily for subsistence. However, in course of their day to day visits to these centres and essential economic transactions the Birhor have also been exposed to some extent, to the socio-cultural world of the rural Hindu peasantry both by interaction and by implication. But they have least political contact with outsiders, and as such their social control is entirely maintained by their own ethnic institutions.

#### *Nature and Extent of Articulation with the Settled Peasantry*

It may be mentioned here that almost every Birhor irrespective of age and sex is acquainted with forests, and his relationship with them is very much guided by some ritual-guild and moral obligation while their participation in and the knowledge of the larger society is somewhat segmental and peripheral.

This, however, does not create any social cleavage among the Birhor. Instead, the knowledge as well as the impressions of these few people about the larger society are manipulated consciously as a model of the entire community. The interaction of the Birhor with the people of the larger peasant societies is primarily instrumental and guided by material or economic transactions (see Adhikary 1974).

The Birhor usually maintain a good relationship and affilia-

tion with the villages near which they make their temporary settlement. A camp of the Birhor is frequently described as an annexe of the village near which it is situated. For instance, a camp near the village Birtolla is described Birtolla *Tola*. This theme of affiliating their temporary camps to the neighbouring settled peasant villages can also be found in other important spheres of life. For instance, in case of marriage when more than one band camp together at a place the people of son's group affiliate to one village while those of the bride would affiliate to another.

The Birhor do not camp near every village. Usually they prefer a known village to a comparatively unknown one. In this case, all the members of a group may not have equal acquaintance with a village. Sometimes some of the Birhor may have bondfriends in some villages. It has also been pointed out that the Birhor also work as magico-religious experts and deal with jungle herbs and other produces as medicines. In fact, the neighbouring villagers have an awe-stricken attitude towards the Birhor for their half-clad appearance and close association with forests, and subsequently, seek their help in various crises of their life. The people in these localities have great faith in supernaturalism which helps the Birhor operate their works in magico-religious activities successfully.

Usually the villagers come to the Birhor settlement to learn spells and incantations, and procedure in divinary activities. The Birhor, in such cases, utter spells in a typical *Sadri* language (a mixed language of Oriya, Hindi & Bengali) which is very difficult for an Oriya-speaking villager to pick up soon. Therefore, the learners have to come to the Birhor frequently and pay occasional tributes to their Birhor *Guru*. From these frequent contacts between the learners and the Birhor *Guru* there develops some informal intimacy which leads to the making of bondfriendship as *Phul-Saya* between themselves or members of their respective families. Out of 59 households comprising 228 individuals 5 cases of *Phul* and 2 cases of *Saya* were recorded. Outsiders involved in such relationship were :

Kurmi Mahato-2, Mundari-3, Pauri Bhuiya-1, and Kamar (Blacksmith)-1. Between persons entered into such relationship new clothes, meals and flowers are exchanged thus binding both the families. *Phul* friendship is established between the males of about the same age and sometimes of similar names while *Saya* (also known as *Makar*) relationship is developed between females of the same age. This ceremonial friendship of *Phul-Saya* is, in fact, developed out of *Guru-Shishya* relationship which is essentially an economic or 'trade relationship'. Status of *Guru* here, is somewhat self-imposed, and this image is drawn from the outside world mainly from the *Sadhu* who wander about in villages and markets, begging and predicting. Such a relationship is, in fact, transitional phase towards the institutionalization of *Phul-Saya* relationship, and is primarily initiated by a villager. Although a villager takes the initiative in developing such relationship with a Birhor, it is the latter who really allures/induces the villager by posing himself as an expert in magical rites. He does it primarily in an unconscious and spontaneous way, and rich contents of supernatural beliefs in the region give him an additional prop. In case of ceremonial friendship with the villagers the initiative may come from any side but usually it comes from the side of the Birhor. In establishing such friendship with the villagers the main intention of the Birhor is to gain certain advantages out of the same, such as to be near the villages in safety, to keep their hunting nets in villagers' houses during rains, to get an opportunity for husking paddy in their husking lever, and so on.

Besides affiliating their temporary camps with the neighbouring villages and making ceremonial friendship with the villagers the Birhor also try to be in the good book of the villagers and subsequently, behave as if they (Birhor) are the villagers' fellowmen. For instance, the Birhor are not good agricultural workers nor do they have much knowledge about agriculture. But if any villager happens to ask a Birhor if he wants to do the job, he cannot directly refuse it for fear of being marked as lazy and 'worthless' people. He, therefore, accepts it. During my stay with a group from January 1973



to April 1973, I found only three ladies who were willing to work as agricultural labourer, and that too, after pursuation. In fact, to a Birhor the return he gets from agricultural labour work is much less than that what he gets from rope-making in that time. By working as a labourer in the agricultural field for a whole day a man or a woman usually gets  $1\frac{1}{4}$  kgs. of rice worth Re. 1.00 to Rs. 1.50, while in that time he or she can *make* rope or rope-made product, casting not less than Rs. 2.00.

If the Birhor come to know of any death or any fatal disease in the adjoining village they abstain from making any sort of merrymaking like dancing and singing or holding any ceremony like marriage, etc. They behave in this way primarily with a view to maintaining a peaceful relationship with the villages.

In course of their day to day economic interaction with the villagers, the Birhor, often have to face several odd encounters. Villagers usually keep off those people. They also ridicule and look down upon them by saying that they are 'naked', 'dirty', 'nasty' and eat unclean food (usually referring to their habit of eating the flesh of monkeys, and thus ridiculing them as *Mankria* or *Manker Khia*). The Birhor are aware of the fact, and thus try to be clean and ritually pure before the eyes of the villagers. The Birhor men try to be as clean as possible by putting on moderate clothes and applying oil on their body and hair while attending villages.

In order to make fun of the Birhor the villagers often ask them what they have taken? When such a situation arises the Birhor reply that they have taken *Mriga Mans* (i.e., meat of deer) and conceal the fact of their taking meat of monkeys.

The Birhor, in course of their constant contacts with the villagers, have learnt about the social distance among the different ethnic groups living in villages and to some extent the concept of pollution and purity. They are also aware of their own social position in the eyes of the villagers. Subsequently, they emulate some of their customs and practices and present a 'conscious model' of their own community to the villagers always keeping in mind the perspective of the neighbouring

settled Hindu peasantry. The Birhor, therefore, say that they maintain a social distance from the Hindu castes like the Dom, Dhoba, Napit, etc. by not taking cooked food and water from their hands. These caste groups are rated low in the regional social hierarchy. They also claim to have abstained from taking beef which is thought to be ritually polluting by the Hindus though they take it secretly. They use vermilion, *Tulsi* (sacred basil) plants and flowers in different ritual contexts. All these practices and ideas they have adopted primarily in an attempt to manage the impressions of the villagers and to interact with them gainfully and peacefully.

However in spite of their tremendous efforts to adjust with the villagers for their day to day essential economic interaction the Birhor do not get all their needs fulfilled in villages alone. They therefore, have to turn to market centres. In the majority of cases the villagers do not make any cash payment for the service they get from these people who, however, often need cash payment to fulfil many material needs, *i.e.*, clothes, metal utensils, axes, tobacco, oil, salt, etc, that are not easily available in exchange or barter from the villages. They, therefore, attend markets not only to cover a number of villages at a time and a specific point of space but also to earn some cash. Due to exposure to a wider area they are also aware of the comparative picture of the demands and the prices of their commodities. Thus when a market is found to be attended by too many people from more than one or two camps, the demand of rope and rope-made products diminishes. Calculating the decreasing demands some of the people then simply withdraw from the particular market and shift camps to other places.

In a market the Birhor of a band do not get scattered. With their ropes and other commodities they usually sit together in one place and make temporary stalls. For this they prefer less crowded areas in the market. Some Birhor are often found to hawk their ropes and rope-made products in different parts of the market, and again come back to the place where they have made their stalls.

Besides these, other kinds of ropes such as jute ropes and cocoanut ropes are also available in markets at moderate price. The people have, therefore, to wander about a large number of villages or have to find out such a market where the products may find a suitable demand. I have seen a man or a woman wandering about 5 to 6 villages in a day, covering distance of 20 km. to 24 km. or travelling about 40 km. to 45 km. up and down to attend a big market. Sometimes in such cases the people also travel by buses or private trucks in exchange of Re. 1.00 or Rs. 2.00,

It is obvious from the above descriptions that in order to maintain their essential economic link with the larger society the Birhor have devised not only various channels of communication but also have developed certain adaptive strategies to tackle situations like extending their area of operation from villages to markets, making certain social relationship with the villagers, managing the impressions of the surrounding neighbours by adopting a few cultural elements of the region and so on. They not only supply ropes and rope-made products to the settled peasantry and occasionally sell live wild animals to them but also carefully make use of the beliefs in supernaturalism prevalent in the larger society. They are, therefore, found to supply many jungle produces of magico-religious value to the neighbouring people. The kind of relationship that the Birhor develop with the outsiders is, indeed, instrumental and is primarily intended to earn economic or material gains. Even the ceremonial friendship (*Phul-Saya*) of the Birhor with the settled peasantry is well calculated and motivated, and its social aspect hinges on economic or material aspects. Though the relationship looks like one of mutual obligation, there is an unstated intention/endeavour on the part of the Birhor to derive the maximum benefit out of it. To a *Phul* or a *Saya*, he may present a rope but primarily with an expectation of having some material gain in return. Thus he is often found to pose, in such transaction, his poverty or needs, as if he has nothing to eat. In brief, the interaction of the Birhor with the outsiders may be described as 'balanced reciprocity' and there is hardly



PLATE-VI



Birhor men and women selling ropes and rope made products  
in a weekly market



any moral disapproval of exploiting or, deceiving any such people.

While interacting with the outside people, the Birhor not only find their ethnic identity at stake but also lack a meaningful world of communication. Their odd experiences in the milieu of the larger society, instead, push them to turn back to their own internal solidarity.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### KINSHIP AND SOCIAL RELATIONSHIP

It is the contention of anthropologists in general that the economics of 'primitive' societies cannot be studied without the social framework of kinship. More specifically speaking, economic relations among the 'primitive' are thought to be guided by kinship relations. Hunting and gathering economics have thus been described within the structural framework of descent and kinship. For instance, Radcliffe-Brown's patrilocal horde (1931), Steward's patrilineal band (1938 ; 1955) and Service's patrilocal band (1962) may be mentioned. Recent studies on them have, however, shown that their social organization is rather flexible and determined by ecological pressure (Lee & DeVore 1968). Helm (1968) has identified three levels of socio-political organization among the Dogrib Indians of the north-western Canadian subarctic.

As regards the Birhor Roy (1925) states that they have 'a two-fold organization', namely, an organization for the purpose of food quest and another for purposes of marriage and kinship (*ibid.* : 62). In the first form of organization which he calls *Tanda* organization a few families unite and move together or sometimes stay at a place as local group in search of food. In the second form of organization which is concerned with kinship and marriage, the fundamental feature 'is the division of the tribe into a number of exogamous clans' (*ibid.* : 89). He also observes that the families of a *Tanda* or food group 'do not all belong to the same clan or kinship group'. He however, notices a tendency among the members of a clan to form a unity at the local level. Williams (1968) describes the Birhor organization as the 'lineage-band' level organization.

We have described in the foregoing pages that the subsistence activities of the Birhor of Orissa are organized in terms of households and bands. Though the bands represent a higher level of group organization the small family-based households are, indeed, their basic production and consumption units. The household that serves as the basic production and

consumption unit among the Birhor is built around nuclear families or variants of them. Out of 59 families, majority are nuclear families or variants of them. Out of 59 families majority are nuclear families (29) while the rest are either incomplete (12) or broken families (18) (*see* Tables 1 & 2). A close probe into their composition reveals that 17 families are built around 2 members only (*see* Table 3). It indicates a tendency towards nuclearization of productive units. The band composition among the Birhor exhibits certain kin association. All the eight bands I studied in the area comprised kin of different lineages belonging to different clans. The situation cannot, therefore, be explained away as merely a flexible social organization adapted to the ecological pressure. A deep probe into the kin groups, family, lineage and clan and the way they are involved in the formation of household and band would reveal that certain basic kin relations, that are developed within a family, and idea of certain kin groups like clan and lineage guide their interpersonal relationships and behaviour in day to day activities. Since the people are dispersed over a wider area it is hardly possible for the Birhor to perpetuate lineages and clans as coherent corporate body and subsequently to operate the segmentary system like other Mundari speaking groups of tribes. However, principles of exogamy and reciprocal relations among groups are retained though the groups are improvised keeping in view of their immediate subsistence activities. Clans and lineages are used as model for their day to day group organization. Groups are so devised as to run the productive system as well as to facilitate the exchange of spouses for the perpetuation of their biological existence through reproduction.

### **Family, its Development and Interpersonal Relationships**

It has been mentioned that the Birhor use the term *Orha* to refer to household, their basic production and consumption unit. However, this term *Orha* is also used in several other contexts. A new household is built after a boy gets married. As soon as an adult boy is married he is separated along with



his wife, from his natal family and builds up another *Orha* or household unit of his own. At that time not only a new leaf hut is built but also a separate *Asthan*, i.e., a seat for *Orha Bonga* (household deity) is ritually installed for this new household. The man maintains and protects this as a sacred one. He carries this *Orha* cult whenever and wherever he moves to. The *Orha Bonga* are indeed the ancestral spirits of the Birhor who are thought to move with them and render help at times of crises. A man on marriage, gets not only economic liberty to run an independent household but also gets direct access to the ancestral spirits, thereby forming an incipient lineage. The term *Orha*, therefore, means not only a production and consumption unit but also a kin group. The household among the Birhor, though seems to be a secular productive unit, is, indeed, devised and built after the image of kin group family. Implicit notion of *Orha* cult at this level is that the *Orha Bonga* like their experienced elders help them in tiding over the natural and supernatural crises. Since the people, very often, cannot keep constant contact with the elders such mechanism of ritual guild to the ancestral spirits at this level has been devised. However, this newly built *Orha* comprising of husband and wife continues to function as a common production and consumption unit, and all the children born in it live and work together for the maintenance of the unit unless and until they attain maturity and are married out.

Family is a cohesive social unit, and its unity is found not only in day to day subsistence activities of its members but also in the way its members live and move.

In a family the relation between husband and wife is of great economic importance. The wife largely contributes to the management and maintenance of the family. It is she who, besides doing her usual work of cooking and rearing children, goes to the villages and markets in order to dispose of the finished products as well as the forest products.

The relationship between parents and children is one of affection and mutual dependence. The sons, from their very childhood, start accompanying their fathers to forests for hunt-



ing game and collecting chop fibre and other forest produces, and thus get socialized. Daughters help their mothers in domestic work as well as in attending markets and villages. Widow mothers are usually looked after by their unmarried sons, who may keep a joint household. Parents are hardly found to be angry with their children. The sons hand over all of their income to their fathers who saves some of it for their marriage. It is the father who ritually hands over to his son the right of worshipping ancestral spirits and installs for his son separate *Asthan* thus initiating him to a new phase of life.

Relationship between siblings is perhaps the most pervasive and important one in Birhor life. In the absence of father it is the eldest son who looks after his younger brothers and sisters. Even after marriage the brothers as well as the sisters tend to live and move together. Younger brothers depend on their elder brothers for knowledge and experience. Their attitude towards the elders is one of the reverence. The elder brothers do not appear to exert any influence on their younger siblings. Instead, they are affectionate and loving. In brief, the brother-brother, brother-sister, and sister-sister relationships are the most enduring ones and are found to be influencing different spheres of life and activity of the Birhor. These relationships become stronger and more pervasive due to the prevalence of sister exchange marriage among the people.

### Lineage and Interfamilial Relations

The family—based households, though operate as independent social units, normally move and live in bands, and co-operate with one another in their day to day economic and social affairs, and form a unity in certain contexts. In a band, some of the families ascribe themselves as *Aleya Orha*, meaning 'our households' in relation to the others who are categorized as *Eta Orha*, meaning 'their households'. In band I household numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 10 and 14 categorise themselves as *Aleya Orha* in relation to the household numbers 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12 and 13. Again, the households 6, 7, 8 and 9 group themselves as *Aleya Orha* in relation to all the other households who are

referred to as *Eta Orha*. This category *Aleya Orha* is, indeed, a lineage group or a *Khunt* at the operational level, and are all related agnatically. This group includes either the families of a few brothers or the families of one or two sons and their father and/or father's brother. There is much cooperation and close interaction among the families of *Aleya Orha* living in a locality. A son who runs a separate household is often found to bring barks from jungles for his old parents who are unable to mount trees and hills but live in separate household. The parents produce ropes and rope-made products out of them, and barter or sell them to maintain themselves. If the parents are unable to travel, their sons also take their products to markets for sale and fetch necessary things for them. Old parents, though live in separate households, are not left alone. They are always found to move and live along with some of their sons' families. In band I Kala Bura and his wife (H.No.14) always moved, and lived with their sons Aharchand (H.No. 10) and Ragardas (H.No. 5). Families of two or more brothers living in a locality also cooperate with one another. Games collected in a communal hunting are shared among the participants in socially prescribed manner but each participant, in turn, again divides his share among his agnates. Even loans in cash or kind are also exchanged between the families living in a locality. Loans are usually given without interest, and to the families who are related either agnatically or affinally. When the group I was staying at Birtolla, Kadlei (H.No.3) gave a loan of rupees ten to his father's elder brother's son Aharchand (H.No.10). There was no demand for interest or any specific date for its return. Aharchand was in need of money and asked for it from Kadlei. However, after a few days, when Aharchand left the group without paying the loan, Kadlei was found to very angry with him for this reason.

The families of *Aleya Orha* do not, however, always live and move together. Any family from such a group may move out and join another band. Nevertheless they form a unity and often ascribe themselves as belonging to one *Khunt* or



lineage. Though every family is an independent unit and has its own *Orha* cult the agnatically related families who live and move together sometimes worship their *Orha Bonga* collectively. In such cases the sacrifice is first taken by the eldest member of the lineage. Affinal kin are not given any share in it. All such families can trace their genealogical connections, and operate as an exogamous unit. Their unity is also found the way behave with other families related affinally.

Ideally a *Khunt* includes all the members who are related through a common genealogical connection. But among the Birhor lineages are dispersed and can hardly operate as an effective kin group. The genealogical knowledge of the Birhor shows that they can reckon, on an average, two generations in ascending generation in father's line, and two in descending generation. In lateral extension they can reckon two to three persons in own generation while only one or two in father's generation and almost nil in father's father's generation. While the knowledge of genealogy gives an idea of a lineage group of two to three generations, in actual day to day congregation a lineage group comprises mostly individuals of one generation, and sometimes of two generations. It may be mentioned here that genealogical knowledge of the Birhor is dependent on several factors such as frequency of contacts, relative age and sex of the speaker.

### Clan and Marriage

Another kin group that is prevalent among the Birhor the clan (*Killi*). It is, an exogamous group the members of which claim to have been descended from a common stock. Members of almost all the clans trace their homelands on some hills or mountains that are now regarded as sacred seats of their ancestral spirits or *Bonga*. For instance, the members of *Lakurchuta* clan believe that the hill Kokodhara in Singhbhum district of Bihar is their original homeland over which their ancestral spirits are still presiding.

Roy (1925) mentions about thirty seven clans among the Birhor in Bihar. In Orissa I found thirteen clans among them. However, the clans do not operate as localised political and



property holding group, nor do they have any specific territory to move about. Clan solidarity is almost lost. Even marriage among the members of a clan is found to occur. Two instances of intra clan marriage were found from the genealogies I collected during my field investigation among the Birhor of Orissa. Though the people could not trace the exact genealogical connections, they remembered the ancestor from whom they claimed their descent (Fig. 2). Since the number of clans among the Birhor in Orissa is only a few and all of them do not have much numerical strength marriage within a clan is often performed. Following the model of clan as an exogamous kin group the Birhor ritually divide a clan into two exogamous groups that are popularly known as *Bansa*. To my enquiry as to why they divide a clan in this manner the Birhor replied 'otherwise how would marriage take place. Marriage cannot take place within the same *Bansa* or *Jat*'. Let me give a few instances. A few generations back two brothers named Jaguar and Ranjikadli of father Nasan of clan *Hembrom* got ritually separated and founded their *Bansa* as *Chauli Hembrom* and *Penre Hembrom* respectively. They introduced different modes of worship for their ancestral spirits or *Orha Bonga*. The intention behind it, the Birhor said, was to exchange spouses. The *Chauli Hembrom* people worship their lineage ancestor Jaguar with *Chauli* or rice as the main item while the *Penre Hembrom* people worship their lineage ancestor Ranjikadli with *Penre* or paddy husks.

In another case, Meghnad Singh of *Lagri* clan had two sons named, Budhni and Chandramohan. Budhni was elder while Chandramohan was younger. After the death of Meghnad Singh these two brothers ritually founded two separate *Bansa*, and started marrying between them. The followers of the elder brother now sacrifice white fowl to their lineage ancestor Budhni while those of the younger brother sacrifice black fowl to their ancestor Chandramohan.

Instances may also be cited from clans like *Lakurchuta* and *Gicksiria*. *Lakurchuta* is divided into *Kokodhara* and *Jupurmaria Bansa* while *Gicksiria* is divided into *Purti* and *Chamria*.

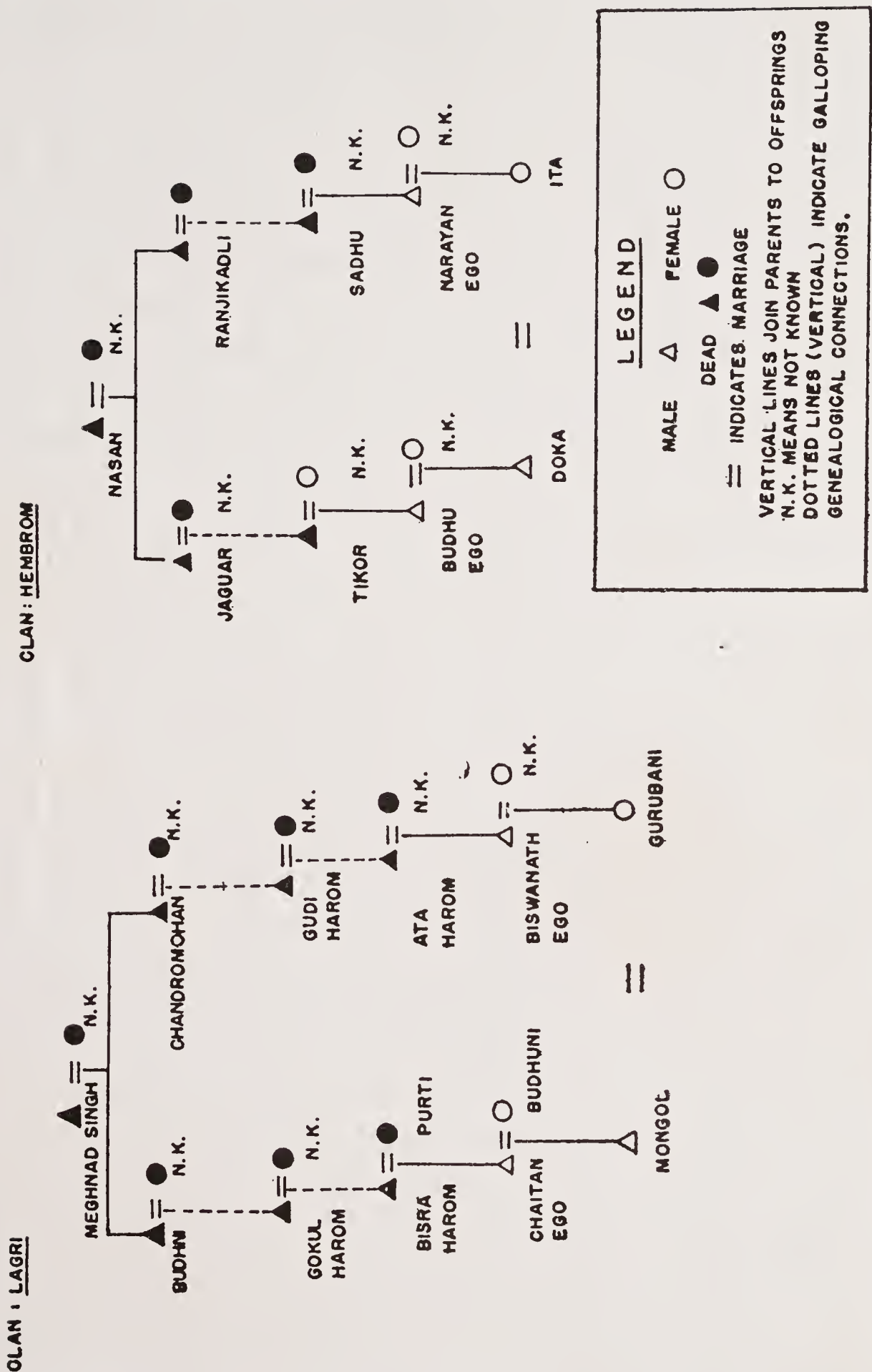


Fig. 2 : Division of clans and occurrences of marriage between the segments of the same clan

This improvisation of clans and lineages into smaller operational groups is necessary not only for techno-economic adaptation of the Birhor with the neighbouring environmental

ecology but also for their essential biological perpetuation through reproduction. It has been pointed out that a band or a local group comprises members of different descent groups that are related affinally. The people keep in view not only an optimum size of manpower for their day to day hunting and gathering but also think of the possible 'crucial fraction' of reproductive units. They, therefore, divide their lineages into small family based households and disperse into wider areas, and unite and move with families belonging to other exogamous groups. This mechanism helps the Birhor not only to maintain a viable social group but also to solve possible scarcity of marriageable spouses. The lineage groups than exchange spouses and continue to live and move together for sometime. In some cases a man may live with a group where he is expected to get a spouse. For instance, in band I Bhatalu of household no. 6 was found to move along with Vinoram of household no. 2. The reason, as indicated by them, was that Bhatalu was engaged with the daughter of Vinoram.

While the members of a lineage dispersed in a region feel themselves united for having common genealogical connection, the members of an operationally devised band are bound together more through the 'guild of exchange marriage' and proximal living.

The movement of a family from one band to another is not very random and haphazard. It always follows a line of kinship relation. The usual allignment of the families among the Birhor for the formation of a band follows primarily the line of brother-brother, brother-sister and sister-sister relationship. A Birhor couple, on marriage, can decide their post marital residence in both the ways, *i.e.*, either in the line of husband or wife. After marriage a man continue to live along with the parents' group or with any of his brother's group, or may go to live in the group of his wife's parents, or of her brothers or even sisters.

Marriage is perhaps the most spectacular social event in Birhor life. It gives a Birhor economic and social liberty as an able man. One of the important purposes of marriage



among the Birhor is the procreation of children, and this is expressed by the people in many ways. In one marriage negotiation where I was present the people were bargaining over the bride price (*Kania Ganam*). The people of the bride's side were demanding about rupees fifteen which the people of the groom's side were not agreeing to. After some discussion, an old man from the bride side remarked to the party of the groom 'we are giving you our girl, and you will be bestowed with so many nieces and nephews. Why are you reluctant to spare such a small amount for the girl?'

Marriage among the Birhor does not concern patrilineal descent group directly, although individuals are involved because of their relationship to one or other of the bridal couple. Clans are now not exogamous but traditions say that they were several generations ago. In the marriage ceremony of Samir of *Lakurchuta* clan the main participants, were his three MoBrS, and two FaBrDaus. The participants were of *Hembrom* and *Dangrakutam* clans. It may be mentioned here that Samir's el MoBrWi was, in fact, his father's sister.

Out of 30 marriages collected in the context of my study 22 are sister exchange and 8 are daughter exchange marriages. The groups involved are lineages of shallow depth obviously belonging to different descent groups like clans or *Bansa*. Hunters and gatherers are usually found to be following cross-cousin marriages organizing themselves in patrilocal or patrilineal bands. As pointed out, the Birhor cannot operate a unilineal band. They, however follow the principle of exogamy and practise exchange marriage. Cross-cousin marriage which demands the perpetuation of large unilineal group is, no longer, present among the Birhor. The usual stable unit among the Birhor is the family-based unit and there is no regular group over and above the nuclear family. The band which is very flexible comprises bilateral kin. Sister-exchange and daughter-exchange marriages are, therefore, found frequently among the Birhor. The smaller the actual exchanging units are, the more likely is ego to marry an actual first cousin' (Fox 1967 : 187). In many cases, however, it is simply a woman of a reciprocal

clan that a man marries. Reciprocal relations are maintained through mutual exchange of spouses. In marriage ritual this reciprocity is ceremonially established by holding a feast by the groom's parents. In the ceremony the bride party comes to the groom's place, and prepare rice and rice-beer, the cost of which is borne by the groom's party. The people of the bride party then serve the rice and rice-beer to all present there.

There are no norms requiring reciprocal exchange between lineages, or descent lines. Statistically, though it may work out this way, there is, however, a marked tendency for the people to feel that they ought to get women from the group whom they gave theirs. This may, in effect, result in a form of patrilateral cross-cousin marriage or 'delayed direct exchange' (*cf. ibid.* : 206). In marriage, women go in one direction in one generation, and although there is no explicit prescriptive or preferential rule to reverse the direction of flow in the next generation, there is a slight statistical tendency to do so (Fig. 3).

It is evident from the above description that though the Birhor emphasize agnatic relations, they do recognize cognatic and affinal relations in different spheres of social activity. Their society, in fact, cannot be delineated as a segmentary system of clans and lineages. However, they hold their kin-groups-clans and lineages as models and adjust with the environmental ecology. In fact, throughout the entire community there runs a feeling of kinship tie. Briefly speaking, the social relations among the Birhor are personal, sacred and based on kinship. They are governed by informal institutions and moral convictions.

Table 2. Type of family

Sl. No.	Type of family	No.	%
1.	Nuclear family	29	49.15
2.	Incomplete family	12	20.34
3.	Broken family	18	30.51
	Total	59	

Households shown above cover all the households of the eight bands studied.

Table 3. Household type according to size

No. of individual	No. of household	%
1	1	1.69
2	17	28.81
3	8	13.56
4	12	20.34
5	12	20.34
6	4	6.78
7	4	6.78
8	0	0.00
9	1	1.69
Total	59	

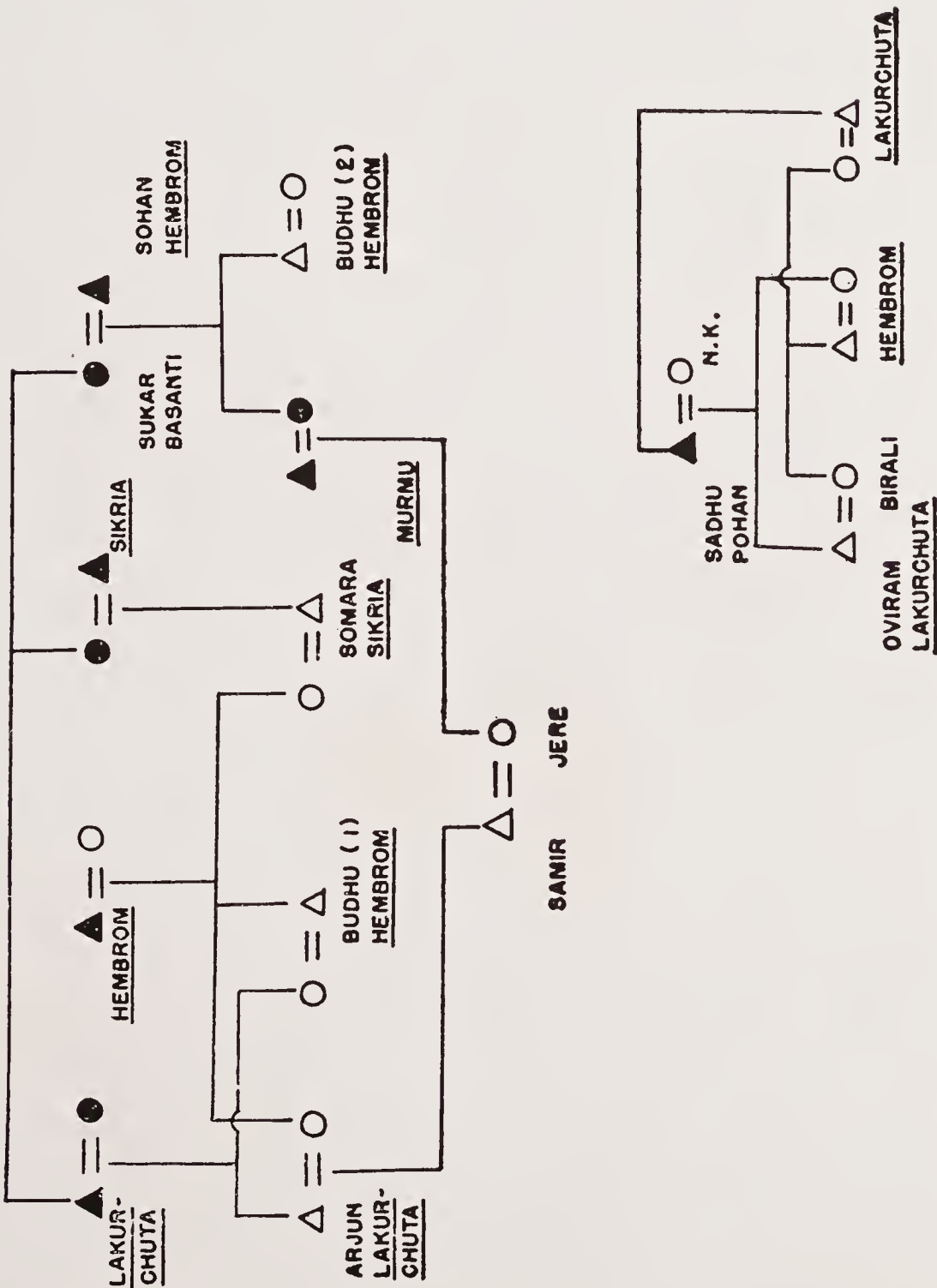
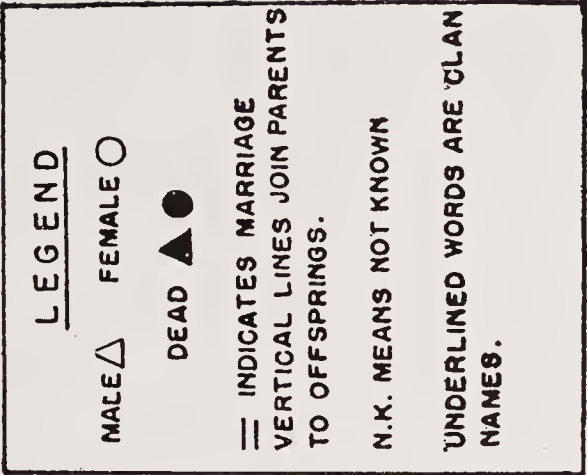


Fig. 3 : Exchanges of spouses between clans over generations



## CHAPTER FIVE

### WORLD VIEW

In the preceding pages it has been described that the Birhor, unlike hunters and gatherers in general, are exposed to the complex market system. They collect forest resources and barter or sell them in the neighbouring markets and villages for their day to day subsistence. The organization of their productive activities shows a tendency towards nuclearization and individualization of units. The bands that are found among the Birhor are composite and flexible in nature, and have lost much of their economic importance. The basic production and consumption unit of them revolves round nuclear family or variants of it. Even their clans and lineages are fragmented and improvised to cope with the techno-economic situation. The social organization of the Birhor is, in fact, very flexible in nature. It has also been found that the limiting techno-economic condition of the Birhor does not create any internal social differentiation. This becomes obvious in the way they interact among themselves as well as maintain symbiotic relation with the neighbouring settled peasantry. The above is broadly an ethnic view of the life situations of the Birhor. An attempt will now be made to describe the reality from a different angle, *i.e.*, from the points of view of the Birhor themselves. It has been assumed that the world view of the people, *i.e.*, the way the people see themselves in relation to the world(s) around them might give us a clue to the nature of their techno-economic adaptation as well as the perpetuation of their distinct socio-cultural identity, and would help us in comprehending the meaningful world they live in.

‘World view does not start from any choice of a particular cultural life. It does not emphasize economy or social structure or personality or even ethos, system of moral norms. It enters seriously into the possibility of devising a form of thought for general use of the real whole of the little community that awaits the insider’s total vision and conception of everything’ (Redfield 1971 : 95). In the following pages I have described their

ideas and beliefs about everything, either visible or invisible, they confront in their everyday life as well as their relations with them. In brief, I have tried to comprehend the whole meaningful world of the people primarily from their existential premises.

While describing their world view I have been guided primarily by my own understanding of the situation, and subsequently, have arranged the material more or less in a structured manner. I have dealt with the meanings that are shared by almost all the Birhor. Many of the concepts and propositions are arrived at by induction. They are of different levels of abstraction. Some are abstracted or inferred from immediate observation while others are arrived at by successive stages of analysis. After describing the different aspects of their world view I have made an attempt to focus on its nature of integration and its impact on their day to day activities

### **The Birhor and their Universe**

The Birhor do not have any crystallised idea about cosmological matter. They never voluntarily talked about the origin and the structure of the universe. However, they broadly divide the universe into two parts, namely, *Rimil* or the sky and *Utaye* or the earth. To the Birhor the earth is a round-shaped flat surface while the sky is a hollow concave structure overarching it. This structure of the universe as presented by the Birhor appears to be somewhat like a cone and is very similar to the structure of their leaf huts.

Some of the Birhor, however, say that there is a world beyond the sky and another below the earth. They do not have specific terms for these worlds, and seem to have varying notions about them. Some call the world beyond the sky *Sarag* or heaven and say that the departed souls live there. Some say that the world beyond the sky is inhabited by human beings like those in this earth but the men there are all cultivators. Water of their fields permeates through the sky on this earth as rains. As regards the world beneath the earth the Birhor can tell almost nothing. They simply describe it as

a dark region full of water. These latter ideas seem to have been derived by the Birhor from the neighbouring Hindu peasantry.

The Birhor are more concerned with this earth (*Utaye*). To the Birhor this part of their universe is again divided into *Muluk* and *Disum*. By *Disum* they mean the forestclad hilly regions while by *Muluk* they mean all the regions on the earth other than the forest-clad ones. Specifically speaking, by *Muluk* the Birhor refer to the villages and markets. The Birhor think *Disum* to be their own country and *Muluk* to be the country of 'other people'.

### Concept of Time

The Birhor gear their activities primarily basing upon some prominent environmental and natural phenomena. They broadly divide the whole year into three seasons, namely, *Rabang* (winter), *Shitang* (summer) and *Da* or *Jargi* (rainy). *Rabang* roughly corresponds the months from October to January when the people feel cold and need fire and the sun to protect themselves. During this time find jungles full of resources. Monkeys are available in plenty and hunting of games becomes easier to them. Days become shorter while nights are longer. When the trees like mangoes (*Mangifera indica*), *Sal* (*Shorea robusts*), and the like start blooming they feel the coming of *Shitang* which corresponds roughly to the months from February to May. During this time the people feel hot and seek shelter in deep jungles or near some water sources. They also experience that jungles often catch fire when *Shitang* comes. *Da* or *Jargi* has set in. During this time it becomes difficult for them to move in jungles for hunting and gathering.

The Birhor use the term *Singi* for a day and *Ninda* for a night. The presence of *Singi* or the sun is day time for them while its absence leading to darkness is night or *Ninda*. They distinguish four parts of a day. They are *Sheta* or morning, *Tikia* or noon, *Aiyub Para* or afternoon, and *Aiyub* or evening. Their *Sheta* starts with barking of dogs when the sun is found to peep through the horizon. The literal meaning of



*Sheta* is dog. When the sun is above head, it is *Tikin*, when the sun comes down towards the horizon, they call it *Aiyub Para* or the coming of evening. *Aiyub* is the time when the sun is no longer seen but its rays still illuminate the earth. In all the cases the Birhor usually point out the positions of the sun with their fingers.

Though the Birhor know the local names for the days of a week, they often use among themselves, the following terms: *Tihi*, *Gapa*, *Mayang*, *Enderyek*, *Terek*, and *Enterek*. *Tihi* means 'to-day', *Gapa*, 'to-morrow', *Mayang* 'day after to-morrow' and so on. It indicates that the Birhor do not have any fixed names for the days of a week. They count days from the present in the direction of future which is closely tied with the present.

The Birhor do not have any abstract concept of time. They reckon time mostly in terms of concrete, predictable environmental phenomena, the knowledge of which is shared by all Birhor. Social activities are not much significant as time indicators, thus reflecting the fluidity of the Birhor social organization. Similar observation has also been made by Morey (1971 : 22-36). Evans-Pritchard has distinguished two concepts of time among the Nuer (1940). The first 'ecological time', is defined as 'reflections of their relations to environment' (P. 94). The second, 'the structural time', represents 'reflections of their relations to another in the social structure' (P. 94). Following Evans-Pritchard's terminology the concept of time among the Birhor may be called 'ecological'.

### **Natural Domain and Supernatural Deities**

To the Birhor almost every natural phenomenon is animated and presided over by supernatural spirits. They talk of a number of such spirits each of whom has a definite area of activity in nature. The appearances of them are however, not well defined. The Birhor worship and offer sacrifice to these deities from time to time, and endeavour to keep them in good humour. These supernatural spirits are thought to play important role in their life and activities.

The Birhor think that the whole universe is created and presided over by *Sing Bonga* or the sun and his wife *Chandu Bonga* or the moon. *Sing Bonga* is regarded by the Birhor as their supreme deity. He is extremely powerful and the creator of all things on this earth. He is basically good and thought to be benevolent. He does not interfere in the domains of other minor Gods and Goddesses though he is omnipotent. He is worshipped by the Birhor once in a year usually in the months of *Paus-Magh* (Jan.-Feb.) and a white cock and a white he goat are sacrificed. *Chandu Bonga* is also worshipped in the months of *Paus-Magh* but in this case a black hen is sacrificed.

It may be mentioned here that there is, in all cases, a positive correlation between sex and colour of the sacrificing animal and the deity worshipped.

Though *Sing Bonga* is theoretically thought to be the creator of everything, it is *Dhatri Mai*, a female deity, who looks after almost all the natural resources and the creatures on the earth. In brief, She provides food to all creatures on the earth and looks after their well-being. She is worshipped usually in the month of *Agrahayan* (Nov.-Dec.). A black hen or a black she goat is sacrificed during her worship.

There are two other important deities living in the east and the west. They are *Lugu Haron* in the east and his wife *Burhi Mai* in the west. Both *Lugu Haron* and *Burhi Mai* are worshipped together annually and preferably in the month of *Paus Magh* (Jan.-Feb.) when winter crops are harvested in the locality.

*Lugu Harom* and *Burhi Mai* have seven sons each of whom preside over a particular natural phenomenon. For instance, *Hanuman Bir* is regarded as the presiding deity over the animal species langur (*Presbytes entellus*). He is worshipped with red fowls. *Bandra Bir* presides over the monkeys (*Maccacus rhesus*). Red fowls are sacrificed to him. *Nanda Bir* presides over wind while *Paban* or *Hoyo Bir* presides over rain and storm. Black cocks are sacrificed to these deities. *Bagh Bir* is the presiding deity over the tigers. Cocks of mixed colour are sacrificed to him. The bear is presided over by *Hundar Bir*. *Babsha Bir*



presided over thunder and meteor. Both *Hundar Bir* and *Babsha Bir* are worshipped with cocks of mixed colour.

The Birhor maintain a relationship with the deities in the following manner. They talk of them with reverence and sacrifice goats or fowls keeping in view of the appropriate sex and colour in relation to various deities. These deities who control natural phenomena or are natural phenomena themselves are thought to be at a higher plane than that where the Birhor live. They think it their duty to worship and make offerings to them.

#### **Knowledge of Forest Ecology and the Birhor's Relation with it.**

Though almost every natural phenomenon is considered to be controlled by supernatural forces, the Birhor are found to implicitly distinguish between the regular course of natural events and more or less unexpected happenings. They show a rational attitude towards the regular happenings in nature. They do not immediately resort to the supernatural forces to account for the growth of plants, breeding of animals and the like.

Though the Birhor are found to exploit only a few jungle resources for their day to day subsistence activities, they are aware of many more in jungles. The animals they know of are broadly categorized as 'eatable' and 'non-eatable'. No specific term is used for these categories. One of my informants informed me of 47 such animals of which 20 were edible. To my enquiry as to why they did not take the meat of some animals they mostly responded that their forefathers or *Bura Buri* never took them. Some of them also said that no one took their meat and it was difficult to catch them. However, the animals are specified mostly in terms of their habitat, nature, colour and size. For instance, within the broad category *Kula* (tiger) they specify five varieties according to the habitat, nature and size. The snake is called *Bin*. But some of my informants told me that there were as many as eighteen different types of snakes. To them some of the snakes are poisonous and some are non-poisonous. Again, among the poisonous ones, some are highly poisonous and fatal while



others are less poisonous. According to their habitat some snakes live in trees, others in bushes and still others in water.

The Birhor are also aware of a large number of plants and trees. Some of them can identify about 48 varieties of plants and trees, all of which are not used directly. Some of the trees bear fruits which they collect and consume occasionally. Leaves of some plants and some creepers are used as vegetables.

Though the Birhor are not directly concerned with all the animals, plants and trees in jungles for their day to day subsistence activities, they are very familiar with and knowledgeable about them. They make use of them for other than consumption purposes and have the following attitude towards them.

They think that the ferocious animals do not do any harm to them if they are not disturbed or harmed. One of my informants of about 50 years of age told me that in his lifetime he had not seen any case of snake-bite among them, nor any case of death from the attack of tigers. On many occasions I came across snakes moving around the settlement sites of the Birhor and noted that they simply drove them away with mild scoldings as if they were mere pets. The children appeared to be sportive at the sight of the snakes in their camp sites rather than being afraid of them. However, there are instances of attacks by wild bear, and other wild animals. Though such cases are usually explained away as expressions of anger of some supernatural deities or as consequences of the violation of some social norms, they are often explained as a result of breaching normal rule of behaviour with the animals. Once I was talking to a man who was attacked by a wild bear and got his left leg injured. He told me that one day when he was cutting the *Bauhinia* creepers in the jungle he saw a bear very near him. He got somewhat frightened and raised his axe to drive it away. At this the bear rushed upon him. In the meantime, his fellowmen who were around engaged in collection of *Bauhinia*, came forward and the bear fled away leaving severe injuries on his leg. He wanted to convey that had he not been after the bear, it would have left him without attacking him.

The Birhor broadly classify the animals into three distinct categories and arrange them in a hierarchic order. This classification shows not only their attitude towards the animals but also the nature of relation they have with them. In the first category they include cows, buffaloes, goats, fowls and the like. All these animals are of domesticated variety and do not belong to the jungle. These are first sacrificed to their deities and then taken by the Birhor. In the second category are included langurs, monkeys, rabbits, porcupines, squirrels and the like. These animals are eaten by the Birhor without any ceremonial slaughtering of them. In the third and the lowest category they include dogs, tigers, bears, snakes and the like. The Birhor do not eat meat of these animals. They say that neither god nor any human being takes their meat.

The Birhor are found to collect horns and bones of many dead wild animals, feathers and nests of rare birds, and placenta of animals like elephants and monkeys for magico-religious purposes. They also collect skulls and other skeletal parts of animals left by tigers. They can easily distinguish between skeletal parts left by tigers and those by other animals. They can locate places where these are found in jungles that are normally inaccessible to others. This, it seems to me, is possible for those who have a fair and intimate knowledge of jungle life.

When trees like *Uli* (*Mangifera indica*), *Matkom* (*Bassia Latifolia*), *Sarjam* (*Shorea robusta*), *Taraf* (*Buchanania latifolia*), *Tiril* (*Diospyros melanoxylon*) and the like start blooming in jungles during March and April, the Birhor strictly avoid cutting their branches. This they do not only because they bear fruits and flowers which are useful to them but also because they feel a kind of communion with nature's ecstasy. Even the trees like *Kadam Daru* (*Anthrocephallus cadamba*), *Hesa Daru* (*Ficus infectoria*), and *Bari Daru* (*Ficus bengalensis*) which are of little importance from subsistence point of view are treated carefully when they bloom. During this time the Birhor hold *Baha Parab* when they wear the various flowers and make merry by communal dancing and singing.



A glance at the Birhor settlement would hardly reveal that there is a habitation or encroachment from outside. The leaf-huts are constructed in such a way as to be undistinguishable from the green bushes around. During summer they hardly bother constructing even such a leaf-hut. They simply plant a branch with green foliage to obstruct the direct wind and the sun, and mostly spend the time behind some bushes or beneath some trees.

Mere thought of the jungle makes the Birhor men (irrespective of age) enthusiastic. Usually they appear to be morose and introvert. But if they are in the midst of jungles they would appear easier, playful, and joyous. Sometimes they are found to spend nights in jungles for hunting. During winter season when days are short the Birhor regret that they cannot stay for a long time in jungles while during summer when days are comparatively longer they feel happy because they can stay in jungles for a longer period. Like men who prefer to be in jungles, women enjoy to working under the shade of big trees. They say 'let us go with our chop fibres to work under the shade of a tree. There is much shade under trees like *Mohua*, banyan and *Sal*'.

### The Society

The Birhor distinguish themselves as *Birhor* from all other people who are broadly categorized as *Diku*, or the alien or foreigner. The term Birhor is a summation of *Bir* and *Hor*, meaning jungle and man respectively. Collectively Birhor means 'man of jungle'. To the neighbouring Oriya-speaking people they are popularly known as *Mankria*, *Mankidi* or *Mankirdia* meaning the people who are in the habit of eating and keeping monkeys. In Oriya dialect *Mankar* means monkey. In some places of Orissa they are also known as *Mankar-Khia-Kol*, i.e., the Kol who eat monkeys. The neighbouring tribal people usually call these people *Birmunda* meaning the *Munda* or the heroes of jungle (*Bir*). The local Munda people, however, call them *Jamsara* referring to their habit of eating monkeys (*Jam* means 'to eat' while *Sara* means monkeys).



However, as to the origin of the people there is a story common among the Birhor of Orissa. It runs as follows :

Once upon a time there was a Kherwar king in Chotanagpur, who had two sons. After the death of the king his sons started quarrelling over the throne. Then the elders of the state came forward to mitigate the dispute. They asked the princes to run a race on horseback and told that the throne would go to the man who would win the race. Accordingly there was a race and the younger prince won. The elder prince was delayed because his turban got entangled into the thorns of a bush on his way. The younger prince became the king of the state while the elder one took to a wandering life in jungles. The present Birhor are the descendants of the elder prince.

In the story given above the Birhor try to emphasize that they had a glorious past and had a definite territory of their own. At present many of the people feel proud if they find an opportunity to identify themselves as *Nagbasi Kherwar, i.e.,* Kherwar of Chotanagpur.

The Birhor of Orissa, however, divide their society into a number of clans or *Killi* each of which has a traditional home on either one or more hills or mountains. Most of these hills and mountains are in Chotanagpur area of Bihar. The members of each clan think themselves to have descended from a common ancestor belonging to a particular hill or mountain and feel a kind of kinship relation among all of them. Each clan has a deity or *Buru Bonga* who is supposed to live in its traditional site or sites on forest-clad hills or mountains. For instance, the deity *Bisrapat* of *Gicksiria* clan resides on the *Kuku Buru, Dal Buru, Hangar Buru, Ranga Buru* and *Matha, Buru*, the deity *Nasan* of *Hombrom* clan lives in *Gnan Buru* and the *Kokodhara* of *Lakurchuta* clan lives in *Tamdia Buru*.

At present the members of a clan are dispersed over a

wider territorial region and no collective ceremonial gathering in their home sites is found. Even the clans do not function as exogamous units. However, all the members of a clan feel themselves united primarily for having a common clan deity. They worship and make sacrifices to their respective *Buru Bonga* from time to time facing the direction in which their traditional homes are situated. Members of each clan not only affiliate themselves with a particular territory in jungles but also sacrifice specific animal to their clan deity. For instance, members of *Gicksiria* clan sacrifice goats (*Meram*) to their clan deity while those of *Hembrom* sacrifice pigs (*Ghusuru*) to their clan deity.

The next kin group to which the Birhor express their belongingness is their *Bansa* or *Jat* which is, indeed, an exogamous lineage. The Birhor of one *Bansa* distinguish themselves from those of another primarily by their mode of worship and the kind of animals they sacrifice to their *Orha Bonga* or household deity. Like the members of a clan or *Killi* the members of a *Bansa* too do not show any operational solidarity except as an exogamous unit. However, the relation among the families of a *Bansa* living together in a locality is more intimate, and frequent economic exchanges are made among them. The most viable group to which a Birhor belongs is the nuclear family around which the basic production and consumption unit of the Birhor revolves. As soon as a man gets married he is detached from his family of orientation and establishes an independent household. His relation with the members of his natal family is, however, not completely cut off. He still maintains close relation with his parents, brothers and sisters and makes frequent economic exchanges.

In spite of the tendency towards fragmentation of their society into small operational units and a gradual dissociation of large viable kin groups the Birhor form a moral community characterised by a strong in-group sentiment. Though they cannot trace exact genealogical connection among many of them, they feel that they are all related through kinship ties. Their common affiliation with jungles strengthens this tie.



Sense of economic competition among them and individual accumulation of scarce resources are hardly found though they live under a limiting techno-economic condition. Interpersonal relationship is often guided by kinship relation and there is always a sense of altruism.

Economic independence and cooperation among the Birhor are highly valued. Everybody tries his best to work and collect his food. Even the very old or physically infirm people are found to run separate households. These people, however, live and move along with some relatives who frequently help them. In one group I found a lame lady who had to crawl on hands and knees and could not mount hills for collection of her food. She was, however, living in a separate household. Her elder brother whom she was attached to used to fetch chop fibres for her to make ropes and rope-made products. She could however, go to nearby jungles to collect *Mohua* flowers and other forest produces.

The aged and the old are greatly respected. They are considered repositories of traditional knowledge about jungles. Though the Birhor have a division of labour in terms of sex and age, every one appears to have some knowledge about their techno-economic activities.

The attitude of the Birhor towards work is worth noting. Every Birhor irrespective of sex and age is a potential labour force. They know it and behave accordingly. They can go on working incessantly, provided they find a congenial atmosphere of forests and helping kin. Idlemen (*Kuria*) are ridiculed and not liked by the people. They have the notion that one cannot get food if one does not work.

The usual gay mood which is expressed among the tribes or neighbouring villages in their everyday communal dancing and singing is not found among the Birhor. Life in a Birhor settlement usually appears dull. The same gay mood is, however, found when they are in comparatively affluent condition. In the evenings of weekly or bi-weekly market days we find the Birhor engaged in communal dancing and singing. On ceremonial occasions, e.g., marriage the Birhor become so involved in



marry making that they sometimes postpone routine work for two or three days.

### Spirits of the Dead

The Birhor identify two categories of ancestral spirits, namely, *Hapram* and *Churgin*. The *Hapram* are again classified into *Bura Burhi* and *Chowrasi*. The *Bura Burhi* are the spirits of the near ancestors whose names are well remembered by the people while the *Chowrasi Hapram* refer to those ancestors whose names are not remembered.

The relationship of the living with their *Hapram* is both contractual and ethical. Every family has an ancestral shrine called *Asthan*, the seat of the *Hapram*. The people protect and worship it regularly and carry it along whenever they shift camps. *Hapram* are thought to mediate between the supernatural deity and the living. They look after the well-being of their descendants and guide their activities in time of crises. The Birhor, however, distinguish the *Hapram* from the deity or *Bonga*.

The *Hapram* live in the supernatural world along with the deity or *Bonga*. In case of worship of a *Hapram* an animal is sacrificed by beating it to death while in case of a *Bonga* it is beheaded.

If the people show negligence towards their *Hapram* and do not propitiate them, calamity may fall upon them. It is not because the *Hapram* are angry with them but because the normal relation between them is discontinued. The *Asthan* where the *Hapram* are installed is regarded as a sacred place, and is highly susceptible to pollution. The people say that no menstruating lady should go near the *Asthan*. A lady who is in pollution period after child birth is also prohibited from going there. Briefly speaking, the living people feel it their duty to look after their *Hapram* who, in turn, look after the well-being of their descendants. They are bound by a perpetual reciprocal relation. It is the belief of the people that when a man dies, his son has to bury his body and construct a leaf-hut over the grave. After two or three days he calls back the

departed soul (*Jiu*) to rest there in the hut. An *Asthan* or sacred seat is prepared for the soul. The son then gives him food and drink. The belief is that if the son does not do that the soul of his father will remain a 'wanderer' (*Bhulah*) and would not get entry into supernatural world to live with other ancestral spirits or *Hapram*. If a man does not have any son, his brother's son may do the ritual. It may be mentioned here that the spirits of the dead continue the individuality of the living persons and have the same names as they had before death.

All the malevolent spirits are included within the category of *Churgin*. The category *Churgin*, in fact, includes the spirits of the dead who wander around and live in uninhabitable places on the earth. The Birhor identify about eight such spirits, namely, (i) *Daini*, (ii) *Pangri*, (iii) *Churni*, (iv) *Draha*, (v) *Khut*, (vi) *Bhulah*, (vii) *Bhulah Chandi* and (viii) *Baghat*.

The *Daini* live under the creepers in jungles. The *Pangri* are blind and live on banks of the rivers or streams. The *Churni* inhabit places where used and broken earthen pots along with all kinds of dirty things are thrown. *Draha* and *Khut* live beneath the big trees or big boulders while small bushes are abodes of the *Bhulah* and the *Bhulah Chandi*. The *Baghat* live in deep jungles.

The relation of the living with the *Churgin* is a constrained one. The *Churgin* are not harmless. They may do harm whenever they get an opportunity. However, the Birhor ceremonially invoke such evil spirits, and offer oblation. They are worshipped at the boundary of the settlement primarily to placate their wrath. They are requested not to interfere with the activities of the living. These evil spirits are not kept completely out of communication. The recognition of evil spirits and the custom of offering food and drink to them in different ritual contexts, in fact, helps the Birhor to maintain structural equilibrium.

All the Birhor, however, cannot get 'Hapramhood'. To achieve that status one needs to conform to the prevalent social norms and customs that emphasize personal conduct as well as maintenance of good relation among relatives. A Birhor, if



dies unmarried, cannot get 'Hapramhood'. Marriage is an important social phenomenon, and it is marriage that gives a man direct access to his *Hapram* and raises him to the status of manhood or precisely speaking 'Birhorhood'. Communal living and maintenance of close relation between parents and children, brothers and sisters are emphasized. If a man does not share the hunted game with close agnates, or if he moves alone, he is not only subject to public ridicule but also to the wrath of ancestral spirits which may lead him to fatal diseases or other misfortunes.

## The Cycle of Life

### *Phenomena of birth*

The birth of a child is regarded by the Birhor as the creation of a new *Jiu* or soul. The Birhor say that *Sing Bonga* is always creating new *Jiu* or soul and sending them to the earth. Once a soul is created by *Sing Bonga* it gets entangled into the cyclic order of the life process.

Along with this belief in the supernatural force of birth, the Birhor hold the notion that cohabitation and sexual intercourse is an essential prerequisite for reproduction. They know it well that if a husband and his wife do not cohabit, children are not likely to be formed in the woman's womb. Once I was asked by one of my informants Dutu Gicksiria of about 50, whether I was married and had any child. I replied that I was married but had no children so far. I further added that *Sing Bonga* would give me children in time. At this the old man laughed somewhat jokingly and told that how *Bonga* would give me children when I was away from my wife. In fact, though the people often resort to supernatural power they are aware of the natural causes and can explain many phenomena in their day to day life.

If a couple does not have any children in spite of their cohabitation suspicion may arise as to their sexual defects. They then resort to supernatural power to ascertain what stands in the way of their begetting children. Both husband and wife may be responsible or neither of them.



May be it is due to the intervention of some evil spirits. An impotent man is called a *Gaiya* while a barren lady a *Banjhi*.

### *Phenomenon of Death*

Though nature of death among the Birhor decides their fate in 'after life', they do not believe in a complete cessation of life. Life is termed *Jiu*. When a *Jiu* leaves a body (*Hormo* or *Kaya*), it causes death. Death, to the Birhor, indicates an important stage of life when some perceptible change occurs in one's life and physical activities cease. This phenomenon is often termed by the Birhor as *Gach Enaia*, i.e., to die. There is a continuity between the worlds of the living and the supernatural and death mediates the two. To the Birhor natural death occurs when a man or a woman dies in old age, when capability to work is almost lost and when he or she has witnessed all the important phases of life, e.g., 'happy' conjugal life, having children and sometimes grand children.

Death is destined by the supernatural forces and cannot be prevented. However, they can distinguish between natural and unnatural deaths. Disease, old age and accident are some of the natural causes of death. To die at the time of child birth, to die from tiger attack or snake-bite, or to commit suicide by drowning in water or by hanging by the neck are unnatural deaths. People who die in such unnatural manner are converted into *Churgin* in their 'after-life'.

As soon as a Birhor child is born it is kept secluded along with its mother for three to five days according to the sex of the child. If the child is a male one, he is secluded for five days. If a female, she remains secluded for three days. After this period of seclusion the child is ceremonially introduced to their ancestral spirits. The child is then taken to each of the households of its agnates living there, and kept on the ground before their huts. The relatives ceremonially accept the child and give it recognition as a member of their lineage. After marriage a Birhor man is not only acquainted with and related to a large number of relatives but also establishes direct

relation with his ancestral spirits. After death he is united with their ancestral spirits and live in the supernatural world.

The life of a Birhor, in fact, operates in a cyclic order. A Birhor transforms into manhood through marriage and into 'Hapramhood' by conforming to the communal life and getting faithful service from his fellow kin. These *Haprm* again in collaboration with higher supernatural deities bestow children and prosperity to their descendants. Aspects of the Birhor world can, therefore, be grasped through the gradual transformation of a Birhor from a human being to a supernatural being, and through the continued and intimate relation with the worlds of the living Birhor, their *Hapram* and the supernatural deities or *Bonga*. The supernatural deities, the ancestral spirits and the Birhor themselves live within their broad universe of *Disum* in close association with jungles.

### Knowledge of Larger Society

#### *Occupational Categories*

Though the Bihor are specialised in the art of making ropes and rope-made products out of *Bauhinia* creepers, they know of a number of other occupational alternatives. They know the occupations like agriculture, basket-making, pottery, blacksmithy, leatherwork, weaving and three to four types of labour work. Of all the occupations they think the cultivation of land to be the most rewarding. They consider labour work and work of artisans as insecure jobs. They say that labour work in road constructions, in agricultural activities, and artisans' work like basketry, pottery, blacksmithy, leatherwork and weaving are very temporary and cannot be run equally throughout the year. The Birhor contend that in such occupations the people have to depend almost entirely on other human communities. If the labourers are not given work, they will not get food.

Though cultivation of land is regarded by the Birhor as more rewarding than any other occupation they know of, they do not appear to be ready to adopt it. To my query as to



whether they would take up cultivation as their occupation, the Birhor replied that their forefathers (*Burha Buri*) did not do this. Would it then be justified for them to cultivate land? When instances as to the adoption of agriculture by some other tribal people were pointed out to them, the Birhor would say, with some hesitation, that they knew it but there was now no good land left for them. When I assured them of good land, they tried to nullify it by saying that to get returns from cultivation, one would have to wait for a long time during which for sustenance some previously accumulated food was necessary. They said that apart from a plough and a pair of bullock, one would need one or two bags of paddy or rice and some money before one could reap a harvest. They pointed out that cultivation of land was a difficult job and would take a long time before a harvest. They also said that there were few good cultivators. To them the *Agarya* in Bamda areas of Sambalpur district and the *Chasa* of Talcher district were the only good and rich cultivators (*Marang Kisan*). The observation of the Birhor, in this regard, coincided with ours. However, when I assured them that they would be provided with good land and enough money and resources they, all on a sudden, brought in the problem of safety of their womenfolk in village life associated with the agricultural occupation. They pointed out that if they adopted agriculture and settled at one place they would be deprived of the pleasures of travelling so many places and coming across so many people.

### *Occupations vis-a-vis Human Categories*

The evaluation of the occupational categories mentioned above is done by the Birhor not only for low economic returns but also for fear of their being marked as a low caste in the village society. They point out that the pursuit of the occupations requires a sedentary village life along with other communities. They feel it well that almost all these occupations have a social stigma and most of the people pursuing them are placed low in the local social hierarchy. For instance, the Pano pursuing weaving, the Dom pursuing leather work, the



Mahali attached with basketry are looked down upon by the villagers, and are kept apart in their day to day social intercourse. Within the broad category *Diku* or the alien, some of the Birhor can specify as many as 23-24 ethnic groups. All these ethnic groups are referred to in terms of their occupations, some of them are also reckoned in terms of their place of concentration or peculiar temperament or habit, or combination of some of them. While in case of broad categorization of the ethnic groups the Birhor bring in their linguistic and cultural differences, in case of specification of each ethnic group its occupations and the social status come into relief. The ethnic groups they refer to are mostly tribal and low Hindu castes. Some Birhor are also acquainted with the name of Vaisnab and Brahman.

### *Concept of Hierarchy*

All the ethnic groups are broadly arranged in a hierarchic order. Most of the Birhor place the Vaisnab, Brahman and Gar *Jimidar* (Gondo) at the top while the Dom, Pano and the Berker at the lowest rung of the order. By implication as well as by impression the Birhor, through their day to day encounter with these groups, have come to learn that some occupations are polluting while others are not.

In course of their day to day interaction with outsiders the Birhor have experienced that they are placed low in the local social hierarchy. Villagers usually ridicule and look down upon them by saying that they are 'dirty', 'nasty', and eat 'unclean' food (often referring to their habit of taking meat of monkey and thus ridiculing them as *Mankria* or *Mankar-Khia*). The Birhor try to be clean and ritually pure to the eyes of villagers. They keep socio-ritual distance from the low Hindu castes like the Dom, the Dhoba (washerman) and the Pano by saying that they are attached to 'unclean' jobs and eat carcass of cows, buffalos and the like. They themselves claim to have given up beef which is regarded as polluting among the higher caste Hindus. In different ritual contexts they are found to use many cultural elements from the neighbouring Hindu society.

*Pattern of Interaction : Birhor vis-a-vis the Larger Society*

While the interaction among the Birhor themselves is guided by kinship and ritual relation, that between them and the people of the larger society is guided mostly by economic relation. Their interaction with any outside people may broadly be characterised by 'balanced reciprocity' and there is hardly any moral disapproval of exploiting or deceiving any such people. In fact, while interacting with the outside people the Birhor not only find their ethnic identity at stake but also lack a meaningful world of communication.

The relationship of the Birhor with villagers is not, however, entirely of 'technical order'. With some of the villagers the people are found to make ceremonial friendship (*Phul-Saya*) and to maintain a kind of social relationship. The relationship between a Birhor and his *Phul* or *Saya* is primarily one of mutual obligation. If a Birhor presents a rope or rope-made product or some jungle produce to his *Phul* or *Saya*, the villager returns something, primarily out of obligation.

Though the Birhor know of a large number of villages they do not encamp near every village. The villages near which they make their temporary settlement must be previously known at least to some of them. Their affiliation with such villages, though temporary, is not very much 'spurious'. Through frequent contacts or through ceremonial friendship they develop a kind of acquaintance with the villagers. In any marriage ceremony the bride's band affiliates to one village, while the band of the groom affiliates to another. In case of any death or any other mishap in the village the Birhor withhold any collective dancing and singing or any other merrymaking. They do so not merely for fear of arousing displeasures among the villagers but out of some obligation. Sometimes the villagers are found to gather around or even to participate in the collective dancing and singing performed by the Birhor in their camp.

From their cognition of the different occupations and the ethnic groups around them it appears that the Birhor suffer from a social constraint of losing their social identity and



natural freedom in the midst of the larger society. A deep probe further reveals that they have little knowledge about the technologies of different occupations like blacksmithy, pottery, and weaving. About agriculture they can talk of different seasonal activities like when seeds are sown and crops are harvested. They do not have any idea about the important agricultural operations like transplantation, harvesting, thrashing and winnowing. As agricultural labourers they mostly do the job of assisting others in the field.

The Birhor, through their experience, implicitly distinguish between two varieties of cereals, namely, wild variety and the domesticated variety. There is no specific term for these varieties but the distinction is very much apparent from the way they handle them. The Birhor broadly use a term *Arno* that includes rice, *Gangei*, *Gondli*, *Janhe*, and *Jandra*. While the literal meaning of *Arno* is rice, it includes all the cultivable cereals. *Kheri* (perched paddy), *Murhi* (perched rice) *Birhi*, *Chichiria* (flattened rice), *Kangi*, *Gohm* (wheat) etc., are also included within the broad category of *Arno*. In case of the food items available in forests their attitude is sacred and humble.

They do not believe in the scarcity of food items in the jungles. They think that one is to go to jungles and collect them. In case of the food items of the larger society the Birhor think that those need careful exploitation. Even they do not consume every food item offered to them by the villagers. They may take it to their camp but do not take it unless and until their old people living there approve of it. It may be mentioned in this connection that the Birhor do not take any domesticated animal like fowls, goats and the like before they are sacrificed to their *Hapram* or other supernatural deities. But in case of monkeys or any other wild games they do not do so.

### *Focus of the World View*

It is evident from the above description that the Birhor confront many more visible and invisible things in the natural and supernatural domains than described in the preceding chapters and maintain a kind of intimate relation with them.



The natural universe, the supernatural and the Birhor themselves are bound together to form a moral world. Every natural phenomenon is animated and presided over by some supernatural deity. Though they seem to have some empirical knowledge about utility of many plants and animals in jungles, and are aware of the regular courses of many natural phenomena, they do not think that they can control and regulate them. They think that the ultimate power lies with the presiding supernatural deities with whom they maintain a ritual relationship.

There is a significant continuity between the human world of the Birhor and the natural and the supernatural universe they conceive of. They consider jungles their homes. The different segments of the Birhor still claim to have their traditional homes on some forest-clad hills or mountains. Manifestation of jungles is found in their settlement pattern and in many other contexts. The ancestral spirits or *Hapram* of the Birhor are placed next to the supernatural deities or *Bonga*. The *Hapram*, however, live in close association with the supernatural deities, and are thought to have power to control many natural phenomena. These *Hapram* work as intermediaries between the supernatural forces and the living Birhor, and often guard their descendants against the evil spirits.

The life of the Birhor operates in a cyclic order. The Birhor live within the natural universe. They get children and prosperity through the supernatural deities and their ancestral spirits. On death they are united to the supernatural world.

The Birhor know of markets, villages, occupational alternatives and human categories of the larger society. They seem to have little 'acquaintance' with them and their relation with them is not very much intimate.

They move about these markets and villages according to the demands of their products. The different occupational categories are evaluated not only for their economic returns but also for their ignorance of the technology involved in those occupations as well as for fear of losing usual freedom in an alien social milieu. It becomes evident in the way they

rank different ethnic groups and interact with them. In brief, their relation with the outside world is essentially through economic transaction, and therefore, not guided by any genuine feeling. When the Birhor are found to live in jungles and utilise resources from there, they are very much 'in nature'. But when they are in midst of the larger society they appear to be alienated. They do not have any uniform or institutionalized channel of communication with the outside people. They change their strategy according to the situations:

However, in course of their continuous contact with the larger society many Birhor seem to be lured to modern amenities. While working among the Birhor of Orissa I found that some people possessed hurricane lanterns, one or two bell-metal utensils, and even umbrellas. These individual efforts have, indeed, not made any significant dent into their world view. The concept of 'good life' is still the same as before. Most of them desire just for two square meals a day, one or two clothes to wear and a little drink. There is hardly any tendency towards accumulation for individual uplift. The little amount that they save is spent for seeking pleasure through collective ceremonies and festivals.

In direct confrontation with the socio-cultural environment of the larger society they have come to learn that they not only are look down upon by the people there but also have little grip over their culturally defined meaning of life. They turn back towards their jungle terrain where they feel free and find a meaningful world of their own. Under the changing ecological and economic situations they thus, often creates myths keeping in consonance with their jungle life.

Many of the natural resources are now manipulated rationally, and used as secular objects. Monkeys and other wild games of jungles that the Birhor subsist on are regarded as sacred objects and they talk of them with much reverence. They often say that one should not even express one's lust for meat of any hunted game before it is slaughtered because it may incite wrath of the presiding deity. Now-a-days, live monkeys are often sold in markets for cash. Thus, when

traders come to their camp to purchase monkeys, they may postpone their regular job of collecting chop fibres and making ropes and rope-made products, and go for hunting. The neighbouring people think that the hunting of monkeys is almost an impossible job. They say that the Birhor hunt monkeys by means of their magical power. The Birhor utter spells and touch the trees in jungles as a result of which monkeys have to come down with folded hands and enter into their nets. They are well aware of this and carefully keep up this mystic impression of the villagers around them. They are also found to create new myth to cope with the changing economic situation. The Birhor often talk of a story asserting their expertise in monkey hunting. It runs as follows : 'long ago Ram-Sita were trying to catch monkeys in jungles, but they could not succeed. They used iron nets but monkeys broke through them. At last they came across Birhor in jungles and asked for their help. The Birhor then made nets by means of chop fibres and trapped monkeys'. There is a strong belief in supernaturalism among the neighbouring settled Hindu peasantry who consider the Birhor experts in magico-religious activities for their close association with jungles and half-clad 'mystic' appearance. This helps them to reinforce their meaning of life in close association with jungles.



## CHAPTER SIX

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This dissertation is a purposive ethnography on the Birhor, a hunting and gathering community of Orissa, and has developed out of an effort to cumulate our understanding about them. In the earlier studies the Birhor are treated as an isolated 'primitive' hunting and gathering community dependent primarily on jungle produces. Later on, it is pointed out that the Birhor, having specialized in hunting, gathering and jungle-based crafts have developed an essential economic interaction with the settled peasantry and operate like a 'nomadic' caste group within the broad framework of the agrarian economic structure of the Hindu caste system in rural India. During my initial encounters with the Birhor of Orissa I found that though the people were found to supply jungle produces to settled peasantry in order to get their day to day food and clothing, they were much inclined to be close to jungles. Their participation in the socio-cultural milieu of settled peasantry was marginal while they seemed to have a 'genuine' cultural base in close association with jungles. In order to maintain their essential economic interaction with the neighbouring settled communities they devised a number of occupational strategies and adopted a wandering life. All these occupations were based on jungle resources and their traditional knowledge of these resources.

Subsequently, I became interested to intensively deal with their day to day subsistence activities with special emphasis on their adaptation to both forest ecology and settled peasantry. The present ethnographic description on the Birhor has, therefore, been made around these problems. For analytical convenience I tentatively formulated two propositions centred around the problem of their socio-cultural adaptation to the two ecological terrains of forests and the settled Hindu peasantry (Introduction, P. 4).

My main purpose was, however, to understand the whole of their society and the mechanism by which it perpetuates its

distinctiveness in the midst of the dominant techno-economic situation of the settled Hindu peasantry. Keeping in tune with the situation of my field I proposed to study the social organisation of their day to day productive activities. I emphasized the processual aspect of the society and took special care to note ideas and sentiments of the people. The conceptual framework of world view was brought in with a view to synthesizing the social and cultural activities of the people as well as to comprehending the whole meaningful world from inside the culture rather than outside.

If we look at the whole gamut of Birhor economy it is found that it revolves around the collection of jungle produces and the maintenance of an essential economic interaction with the neighbouring settled peasantry. The Birhor collect jungle produces and exchange them with settled peasantry for their day to day livelihood. They, however, do not collect all the jungle resources equally. They are found to be concerned primarily with the collection of *Bauhinia* creepers that grow profusely in the jungles of Orissa where I did my field work. They prepare different kinds of ropes and rope-made products out of barks (*Chakkam*) of these creepers, and are specialised in this profession. They also procure various minor forest produces and exchange them with the neighbouring peasantry. The primary mode of production of the Birhor is, therefore, 'gathering' of jungle produces. Hunting of wild games is another aspect of their economic activities. But hunting is pursued occasionally and games hunted are used primarily for consumption of meat. They also sell live games and skins of langurs if they find such an opportunity. Hunting, in fact, does not contribute much to their total economy. However, the Birhor still keep up a spirit of hunting, and continue this mode of production as a cultural norm.

In order to perpetuate their essential economic interaction with the larger society the Birhor devise various adaptive strategies. While moving around they make their temporary camps near some peasant villages, and often enter into bond-friendship with the villagers. These strategies help them to



make a kind of 'social insulation' with the neighbouring settled peasantry and run their trade peacefully and profitably. However, in course of their day to day economic interaction with the neighbouring Hindu peasantry they have experienced many odd encounters that have insulated them from the peasantry and kept them at the periphery. They have come to learn that they are looked down upon by the Hindu castes living around and placed low in the local social hierarchy. They adjust with these situations by carefully managing the impressions of the people of the larger society. They are, therefore, found to emulate certain cultural features of the Hindu peasantry, maintain social distances from the low Hindu castes and avoid certain food items that are considered polluting in the local Hindu society. They, however, concede their subordinate position in the local social milieu but suffer from a constraint for being placed in an irreversible hierarchic order, thereby losing their usual freedom. They, therefore, remain at the periphery of the settled Hindu peasantry and adopt a wandering life. While working as magico-religious experts to the villagers and moving around the villages as mendicants like the Vaishnav *Sadhu* the Birhor feel free from the usual social and technological constraints in the midst of the larger society. In perpetuating such a profession the Birhor make a careful and rational use of the widely prevalent beliefs in supernaturalism in the locality and the image of the itinerant *Sadhu*. The strategic exploitation of ideological contents of the local Hindu society is also found among many other nomads in India (*cf.* Misra 1969).

The Birhor refer to two social groups, namely, household (*Orha*) and band (*Tanda* or *Tola*) that they organize around their day to day productive activities of rope-making and hunting of wild games. Household or *Orha* among the Birhor serves as their basic production unit, and revolves around nuclear family of husband, wife and unmarried children. Most of them are, however, found to comprise of partial or broken families and consist of two individuals only and reveal a tendency towards nuclearisation of productive units. Local



groups or bands among the Birhor are bilateral in composition and show a flexible nature. There is no central authority to regulate the formation of a band. It has also no territorial affiliation. Considering the aspect of productive activities, the social organization of the Birbor may be termed as a family level organisation as was defined by Steward in the case of the Shoshone of North America. But, unlike the Shoshone the band formation among the Birhor is not seasonal. It is a regular phenomenon and the Birhor always move and live in bands of several related households though hunting is not of much economic importance. However, the people possess a sacred attitude towards wild games, hunting of which needs collective endeavour. The Birhor are very fond of meat of monkey and find great pleasures in hunting monkeys. This attitude towards wild games and hunting helps the Birhor to maintain a higher level of group organization. Need for social security in the face of external forces is another factor that stands in the way of progressive fragmentation of social units.

Besides these, the Birhor have some internal mechanism through which they try to arrest the gradual social disintegration. They divide their patrilineal clans and lineages into small operational groups and then align themselves in such a way as to maintain an effective scale of society as to facilitate the solution of the probable scarcity of marriageable spouses. Bands among the Birhor are always found to comprise of marriageable kin groups. The rule of exogamy, the principle of reciprocity as well as the autonomy of individual household to move from one band to another help maintain interband communication over a wider region.

In order to see spouses as well as to see relatives like brothers and sisters the Birhor often move from one band to another. During marriage ceremonies and certain festive occasions sometimes several bands agglomerate together when a gathering of 100-125 individuals may be found.

Though there is no effective centralized political authority to hold the scale of society at a higher level, all the Birhor feel themselves bound together by a kinship tie. Therefore, in

spite of their tendency towards nuclearization of units, interpersonal relationship among the Birhor is guided by generalised reciprocity. Though reciprocal relation among the relatives sometimes become constrained, the Birhor do not venture to breach the norm of reciprocity for fear of losing social status. Though there is hardly any effective solidarity among the members of a clan (*Killi*), it is held as a model of kin group, and all the people belonging to a clan feel themselves united.

All the Birhor associate themselves with the jungle and form a moral community. Certain repulsive forces from the neighbouring caste-based Hindu society strengthens this in-group sentiment as Birhor, *i.e.* 'men of jungle'.

In conclusion we may now say that though the Birhor adopt hunting and gathering as their primary mode of production, they are very much entrapped within the framework of the agrarian economic structure of the rural peasantry. They, however, maintain their social and political independence. Their society is regulated by their own social customs and norms, and traditional institutions in a spontaneous manner. Though they cannot operate clan-lineage based segmentary system like other Mundari groups of tribes, they maintain a scale of society of 100 to 150 individuals through occasional ritual and ceremonial agglomeration of several bands as well as through their occasional meetings in weekly and bi-weekly markets. In confrontation with the socio-cultural environment of the larger society the people have developed a strong in-group sentiment. This helps them to assert their internal solidarity as 'Birhor' or 'men of jungle'. However, considering the whole social situation it may be said that the society of the Birhor operates both at the level of *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft*. While moving in villages and markets, and interacting with the people of the larger society, they seem to form a *gesellschaft* type of society. But when they live in the midst of jungles and interact among themselves they form a *gemeinschaft* type of society.

In the beginning of our project we assumed that the present techno-economic adaptation of the Birhor was integrated with



their world view. Our concern was, therefore, to describe the world view of the whole community living at a particular level of economy.

There are, however, instances that world view of a people changes slowly and lags behind in spite of economic changes. Redfield (1953) in an endeavour to study impact of 'technological and urban revolution on primary world view', observes that man-nature-supernature relationship which is unitary in 'primary world view' gets dissociated with the change of economy. Among the Guatemalan Indians Tax (1941) observes that in spite of changes in their economy these people view nature as personal and concerned with man. He, however, notes that social relations among themselves as well as with the people of other communities are mostly impersonal and charged with a commercial spirit. Turnbull (1961) observes that though the Pygmies of Ituri forest in Central Congo of Africa maintain regular economic symbiosis with the neighbouring Negroes, they maintain a different cultural world of their own in close association with forests. He describes them as 'men in nature'.

In all these instances world view was seen more or less as 'a stable and abstract picture of the universe and its meanings'. But world view is also 'something constantly in process : a fluctuating assemblage of more or less connected ideas that change as to focus, affective coloring perhaps, the content and choice of connections and emphasis' (Redfield 1962b : 281). Though the Birhor are found to form a moral community with their jungle ecology and live in a moral world where man, nature and supernature are bound together, they also show resilience in rational thinking. In course of their long contact with the settled peasantry they have developed a 'rational' market-oriented economy. They, therefore, adopt a number of occupational strategies keeping in view of their demands in the larger society. They do often manufacture saleable exchangeable commodities out of jungle produces and work as magico-religious experts or itinerant mendicants. In this pursuit they utilize cleverly the image of the local itinerant *Sadhu* as



well as the impressions that the peasants have about them as a half-clad mystic people of jungle. In all the cases they draw heavily on jungle resources and their traditional knowledge of these resources. Though in an unformulated manner, the Birhor carefully manipulate some aspects of world view of the neighbouring settled peasantry most of whom belong to tribal communities and low Hindu castes. Like many other tribes in India (Sinha 1958), the neighbouring peasant people in this area of Orissa have close association with jungles and are found to be inclined much to supernaturalism to cope with their day to day life-crises. This aspect of life of the neighbouring settled peasantry helps the Birhor to turn back to their jungle terrain which is integrated with their world view. Though many of the jungle resources are now exploited as a 'necessity' for survival, the intimate moral relations with them are not disrupted. Instead, their knowledge of the larger society has helped them to reinforce the meaning of their wandering life in close association with forests.

The whole spectrum of Birhor world view that is presented here is, therefore, not a static picture of their universe. It incorporates the changing scene of their life situations and in turn, guides their day to day life and activities. It is not just the fossilized persistence of an idealized archaic world view but a picture of adaptive relevance of a view of the world where the meaning of their special relation with the forest ecology in the contemporary life situation is reinforced.

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## GLOSSARY

<i>Agrahayan</i>	The eighth month in the Bengali calendar
<i>Aiyub</i>	Evening
<i>Aiyub Para</i>	Afternoon
<i>Aleya Orha</i>	Our household
<i>Arno</i>	Rice
<i>Babsha Bir</i>	Presiding deity of thunder and meteor
<i>Bagh Bir</i>	Presiding deity of tigers
<i>Baghat</i>	Spirits of those who die by tiger attack
<i>Baha Parab</i>	Flower festival
<i>Bahinga</i>	Carrying pole
<i>Banjhi</i>	A barren lady
<i>Bandra Bir</i>	Presiding deity of monkeys ( <i>Maccacus</i> variety)
<i>Bansa</i>	A segment of the Birhor community
<i>Bari</i>	Garden (An Oriya word)
<i>Bari Daru</i>	Banyan tree
<i>Bauhinia</i>	A kind of jungle creeper
<i>Bebera</i>	The drivers of games during hunting in jungles
<i>Bhulah</i>	Wanderer—Specially referred to a wandering evil spirit
<i>Bhulah Chandi</i>	A malevolent spirit of the dead
<i>Bin</i>	Snake
<i>Bir</i>	Jungle
<i>Birhi</i>	A kind of pulses cultivated in the locality
<i>Birhor</i>	Men of jungle
<i>Birmunda</i>	Heroes of the jungle
<i>Bisrapat</i>	Name of the deity of the people of <i>Gicksiria</i> clan
<i>Bura Buri</i>	Literally means old men and old women—Specifically referred to forefathers
<i>Burhi Mai</i>	Name of a female deity
<i>Chamria</i>	A segment of clan <i>Gicksiria</i>
<i>Chandu Bonga</i>	Goddess moon
<i>Chakkam</i>	Barks (especially of <i>Bauhinia</i> creepers)
<i>Chauli</i>	Rice
<i>Chauli Hembrom</i>	A segment of clan <i>Hembrom</i> , the members of which use rice as primary item of oblation
<i>Chichiria</i>	Flattened rice
<i>Chowrasi Hapram</i>	Ancestral spirits (benevolent) whose names are not remembered
<i>Chura</i>	Flattened rice
<i>Churgin</i>	Malevolent spirits of the dead
<i>Churni</i>	Malevolent spirits of the dead



<i>Da</i>	Water, Sometimes used to denote rainy season
<i>Daini</i>	A malevolent spirit of the dead
<i>Dal Buru</i>	Name of a hill
<i>Dangrakutam</i>	Name of a clan
<i>Dharti Mai</i>	Mother goddess earth
<i>Dhauri</i>	A kind of rope having a number of loops suspended from it
<i>Diku</i>	An alien or foreigner
<i>Disum</i>	Literally means country, Usually referred to denote forest-clad regions
<i>Draha</i>	A malevolent spirit of the dead
<i>Endreyek</i>	Fourth ensuing day
<i>Enterek</i>	Sixth ensuing day
<i>Eta Orha</i>	Their household
<i>Gach Enaia</i>	To die
<i>Gaiya</i>	An important man
<i>Gangoi</i>	A kind of cereal
<i>Gaoli Bazar</i>	Village market
<i>Gapa</i>	To-morrow
<i>Gari</i>	Monkey
<i>Gari Jhari</i>	Net used for hunting monkeys
<i>Gari Sau</i>	Monkey trader
<i>Ghusuru</i>	Pig
<i>Gicksiria</i>	Name of a clan
<i>Gnan Buru</i>	Name of a hill
<i>Gohm</i>	Wheat
<i>Gondli</i>	A kind of cereal
<i>Guru</i>	Preceptor
<i>Guru-Shishya</i>	Indicates relationship between a preceptor and his disciple.
<i>Hangar Bir</i>	Name of a hill
<i>Hanuman Bir</i>	Presiding deity of langurs
<i>Hanu Harta</i>	Skin of langurs
<i>Hapram</i>	Benevolent ancestral spirits
<i>Hembrom</i>	Name of a clan
<i>Hesa Daru</i>	A tree named <i>Ficus infectoria</i>
<i>Hor</i>	Man
<i>Hormo</i>	Body
<i>Hoyo Bir</i>	Presiding deity of rain and storm
<i>Jagghi</i>	Settled people
<i>Jam</i>	To eat
<i>Jansara</i>	Monkey eater or the people who eat meat of monkeys
<i>Jandra</i>	A kind of cereal
<i>Janhe</i>	A kind of cereal

<i>Jargi</i>	Water, Sometimes used to refer to rainy season
<i>Jat</i>	Denotes a group or a segment within the Birhor community
<i>Jhari</i>	Net
<i>Jimidar</i>	Zeminder, By the term the Birhor refer to the Gondo
<i>Jiu</i>	Soul or life
<i>Joti</i>	A kind of narrow rope
<i>Kadam Daru</i>	A tree named <i>Anthrocephallus cadamba</i>
<i>Kangi</i>	A kind of cereal
<i>Kania Ganam</i>	Bride price
<i>Kaya</i>	Body
<i>Kendu</i>	A fruit bearing tree named <i>Diospyros melanoxylon</i>
<i>Khail/Kheri</i>	Puffed rice
<i>Khaini</i>	Powdered tobacco mixed with lime
<i>Khia</i>	To eat
<i>Khut</i>	An evil spirit
<i>Khunt</i>	Lineage
<i>Killi</i>	Clan
<i>Kokodhara</i>	Name of a hill, Also denote a clan deity
<i>Kuku Buru</i>	Name of a hill
<i>Kula</i>	Tiger
<i>Kuria</i>	An idle or lazy man
<i>Kusum</i>	A tree named <i>Schleichera trijuga</i>
<i>Lagri</i>	Name of a clan
<i>Lakurchuta</i>	Name of a clan
<i>Lengate Fari</i>	Left hand
<i>Lugu Harom</i>	Name of a supernatural deity
<i>Magh</i>	Tenth month in the Bengali as well as the Oriya calendar
<i>Makar</i>	Ceremonial friend
<i>Mankar</i>	Monkey
<i>Mankar-khia</i>	The people who eat monkeys
<i>Mankidi/Mankria/ Mankirdia</i>	The people who eat and tame monkeys
<i>Mankar-Khia-Kol</i>	The kol who eat monkeys
<i>Mankria Babu</i>	Honorific term used for addressing present author, which means a gentleman belonging to Mankria tribe
<i>Marang Diku</i>	Rich alien or foreigner
<i>Marang Kisan</i>	Rich cultivator
<i>Matha Buru</i>	Name of a hill
<i>Matkom</i>	A tree named <i>Bassia latifolia</i>
<i>Meram</i>	Goat
<i>Meyang</i>	Day after to-morrow

<i>Mohua</i>	A tree named <i>Bassia latifolia</i>
<i>Mriga Mans</i>	Meat of deer
<i>Muluk</i>	Country, By the term the people refer to villages and markets
<i>Nagbasi Kherwar</i>	The Kherwar who trace their origin from Chotanagpur
<i>Nanda Bir</i>	Presiding deity of wind
<i>Nasan</i>	Name of the clan deity of the <i>Hembrom</i> people
<i>Ninda</i>	Night
<i>Orha</i>	Household
<i>Orha Bonga</i>	Household deity
<i>Paban Bir</i>	Presiding deity of rain and storm
<i>Pahan</i>	Priest
<i>Pakhal</i>	Watered rice
<i>Pangri</i>	An evil spirit
<i>Pauri</i>	Hill men
<i>Paus</i>	Ninth month in the Bengali as well as the Oriya calendar
<i>Penre</i>	Husks of paddy
<i>Penre-Hembrom</i>	A segment of elan <i>Hembrom</i>
<i>Phul</i>	Ceremonial friend (male)
<i>Phul-Saya</i>	Denotes a kind of ceremonial relationship
<i>Purti</i>	A segment of clan <i>Gicksiria</i>
<i>Rabang</i>	Winter season
<i>Ragi</i>	A kind of cereal
<i>Ranga Buru</i>	Name of a hill
<i>Rimil</i>	The sky
<i>Sadri</i>	A mixed language especially of Hindi, Bengali and Oriya
<i>Sadhu</i>	Mendicant
<i>Sal</i>	A tree named <i>Shorea robusta</i>
<i>Sara</i>	Monkey
<i>Sarag</i>	Heaven
<i>Sari</i>	Loin cloth used by the ladies
<i>Sarjam</i>	A tree named <i>Shorea robusta</i>
<i>Saya</i>	Ceremonial friend (female)
<i>Sheta</i>	Literally means dog, Also denotes morning
<i>Shitang</i>	Summer season
<i>Singi</i>	The Sun, Also denotes day
<i>Shika</i>	A rope-knit bag having long arms
<i>Sing Bonga</i>	Sun god
<i>Taini</i>	Small stick
<i>Tamdia Buru</i>	Name of a hill
<i>Tanda</i>	Band



<i>Taraf</i>	A tree named <i>Buchania latifolia</i>
<i>Terek</i>	Fifth ensuing day
<i>Tihi</i>	To-day
<i>Tikin</i>	Noon
<i>Tiril</i>	A tree named <i>Diospyros melanoxylon</i>
<i>Tola</i>	Band
<i>Tulsi</i>	Sacred basil
<i>Tur</i>	Mouse
<i>Tur Jhari</i>	Net used for trapping mice
<i>Uli</i>	Mango tree
<i>Utaye</i>	The earth
<i>Uthulu</i>	Nomadic











